MARVEL EXCLUSIVE AGATHA ALL ALONG

It's showtime! The ghost with the most returns for a spirited sequel

FUTURE

PLUS THE PENGUIN ROBERT DOWNEY JR.'S MCU RETURN DEMI MOORE HALLE BERRY COLMAN DOMINGO KATE WINSLET TRANSFORMERS

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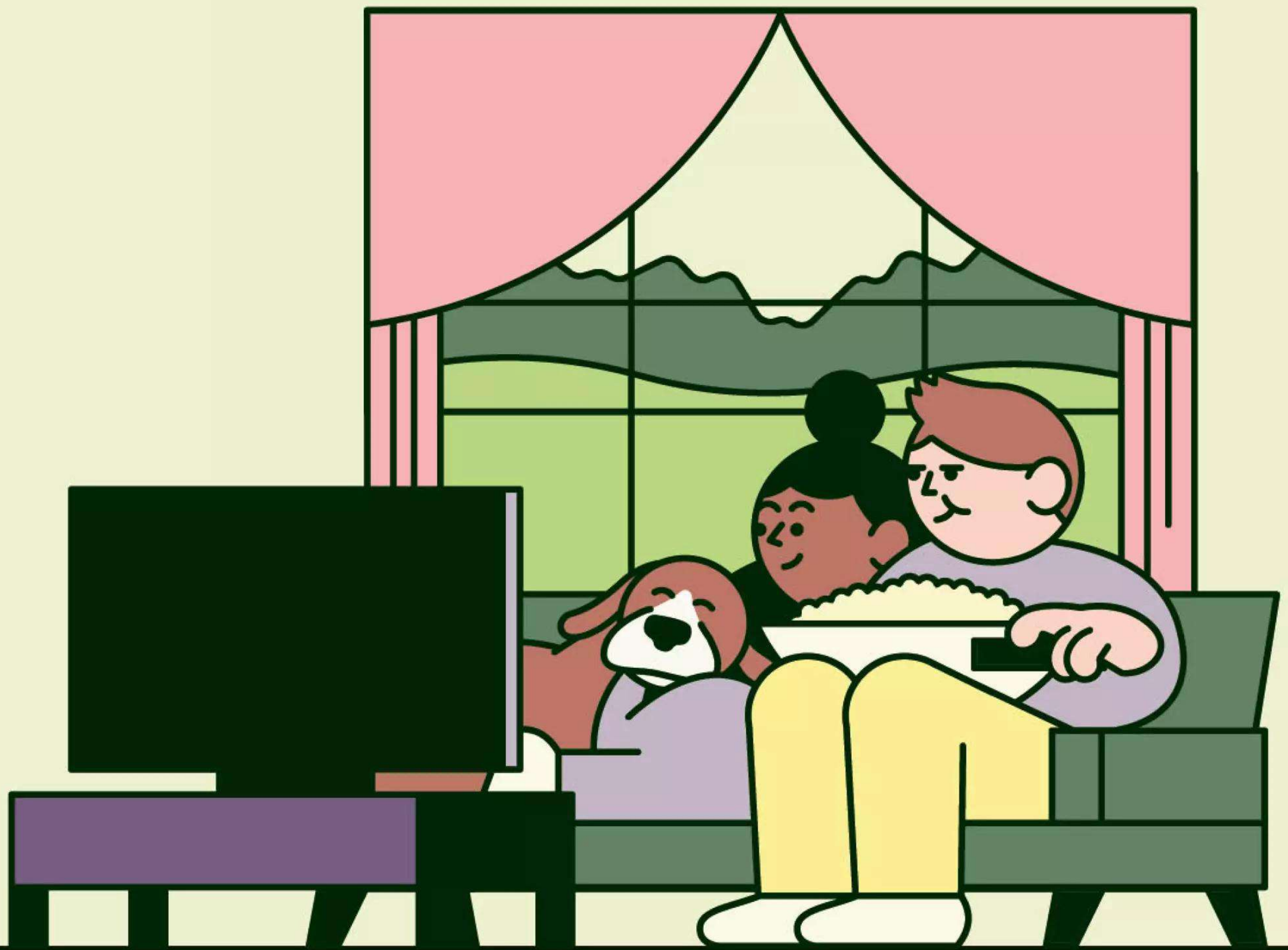

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Welcome to

TOTAL FILM

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

Beetlejuice certainly isn't a name I'd have said three times as a kid. The film occupied a strange ne(i)therworld for me, in that I absolutely loved it, but I was also just a little bit terrified of it: the scene in which Geena Davis and Alec Baldwin age and crumble at super-speed still gives me the heebie-jeebies. But now feels like a pretty good time to summon the bio-exorcist to delight and frighten a new generation.

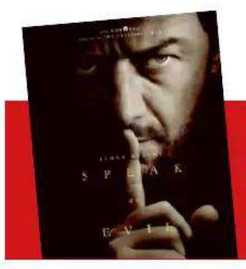
Yes, Michael Keaton got nuts in *The Flash*, but *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* provides him with the opportunity to really cut (the Juice) loose. And Tim Burton – back on a high after the success of Netflix series *Wednesday* – has fully committed to the practical effects, which is the kind of nostalgia that I can really get behind. Jane Crowther got a taste of it first-hand when she visited the set, which you can read all about in this issue's access-all-areas cover feature.

Elsewhere, when it comes to enjoyable spooky throwbacks, we're also getting excited about the MCU's next Disney+ series, *Agatha All Along*, which sees Kathryn Hahn returning as the breakout character from *WandaVision*. Plus, we're digging into the boldest gambles that directors have taken when it comes to putting their money where their mouths are; getting the story on Coralie Fargeat's twisted body horror *The Substance*; and digging deep with the cast of *His Three Daughters*: Carrie Coon, Elizabeth Olsen and Natasha Lyonne. You want more? Well, Colman Domingo discusses his hard-earned craft, and we go in-depth with Saoirse Ronan ahead of one of her best performances yet in *The Outrun*. There are also new looks at *Wolfs*, *The Penguin*, *Transformers One* and the biggest news from San Diego Comic-Con.

Enjoy the issue!

Matt

MATT MAYTUM, EDITOR
@MATTMAYTUM



We're hosting a special early screening of James McAvoy's psychological thriller *See No Evil* on 9 September in London. For the chance to score tickets, make sure you're signed up to our newsletter: **gamesradar.com/sign-up-for-the-total-film-newsletter**

CALL SHEET
THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
JANE CROWTHER
@JANEVGCROWTHER

I loved poking around on the *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* set, and in particular trying on a specific costume that I cannot divulge. One day I will release the pictures!

DEPUTY EDITOR
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

Demi Moore was wearing a *Mandalorian* T-shirt during our interview for *The Substance*, noting that Grogu reminds her of her beloved chihuahua Pilaf. I can see the resemblance.

NEWS EDITOR
LAUREN MILES
@LAUREN_M1LES

Even better than meeting Kate Winslet's dog Dolly was being introduced to Henry Selick's collection of stop-motion puppets: 'It's like being surrounded by old friends,' the director grinned.

CONTRIBUTOR
KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER
@K_IMBOT

Kathryn Hahn and I unwittingly matched for our interview. 'I love our white tank tops!' she said. 'Yours looks much more fancy. I just came from the gym.' It cost a fiver, I said. Her response? 'Always looks the chicest.'

ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
EMILY MURRAY
@EMILYVMURRAY

It's always been a dream of mine to attend a Hall H Marvel Studios panel – and the energy was electric. Especially when Robert Downey Jr. was unmasked as Doctor Doom!

DEPUTY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
FAY WATSON
@FAYANNAWATSON

I had a blast watching *Deadpool & Wolverine* at San Diego Comic-Con with Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman, who danced all the way through the opening scene.

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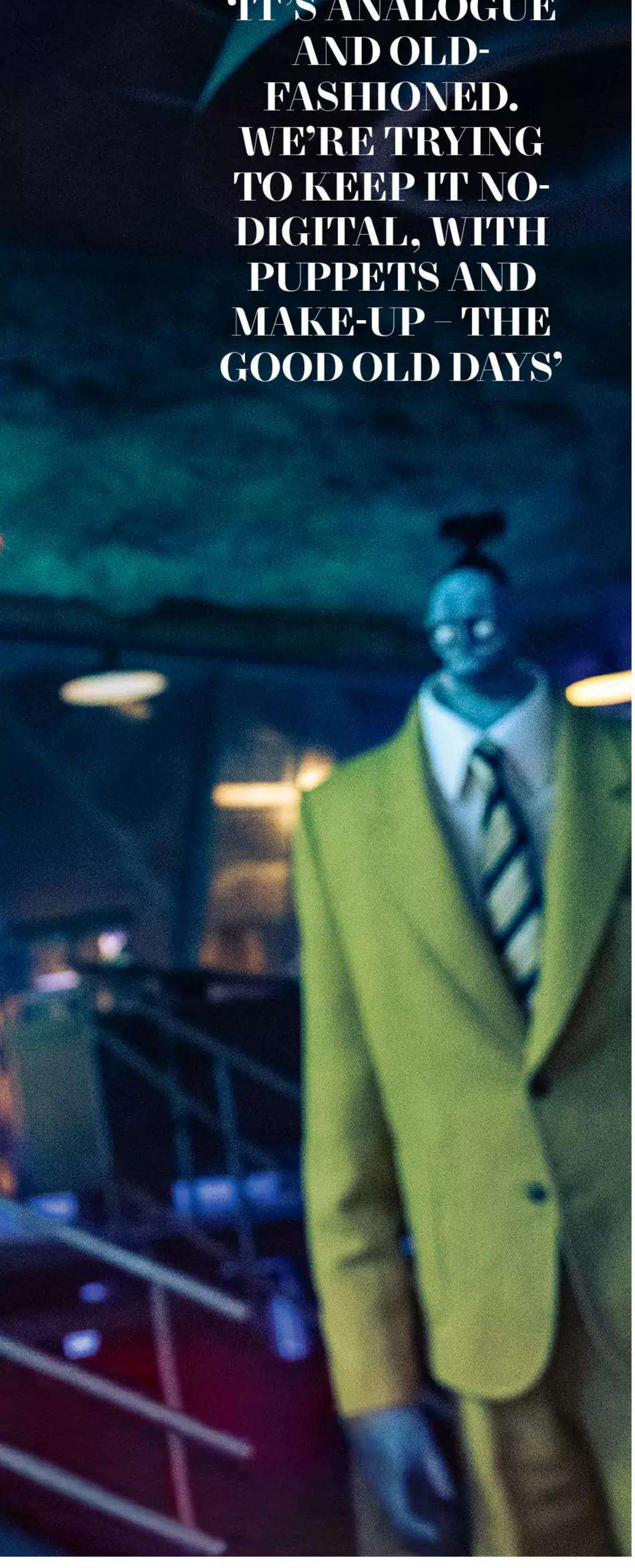
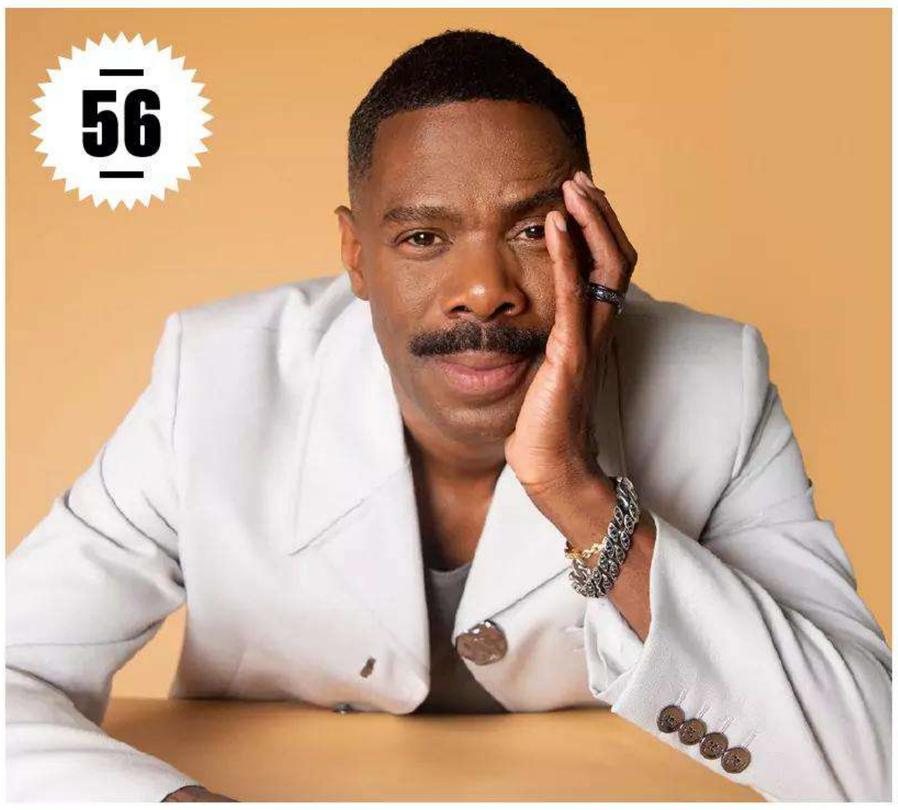


‘IT’S ANALOGUE AND OLD-FASHIONED. WE’RE TRYING TO KEEP IT NO-DIGITAL, WITH PUPPETS AND MAKE-UP – THE GOOD OLD DAYS’



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SCOTT GARFIELD/COLUMBIA/APPLE, MARVEL, MARTIN SCOTT POWELL, PARISA TAGHIZADEH/WARNER BROS., CHRISTINE TAMALET/UNIVERSAL STUDIOS, BEN TRIVETT/CONTOUR BY GETTY

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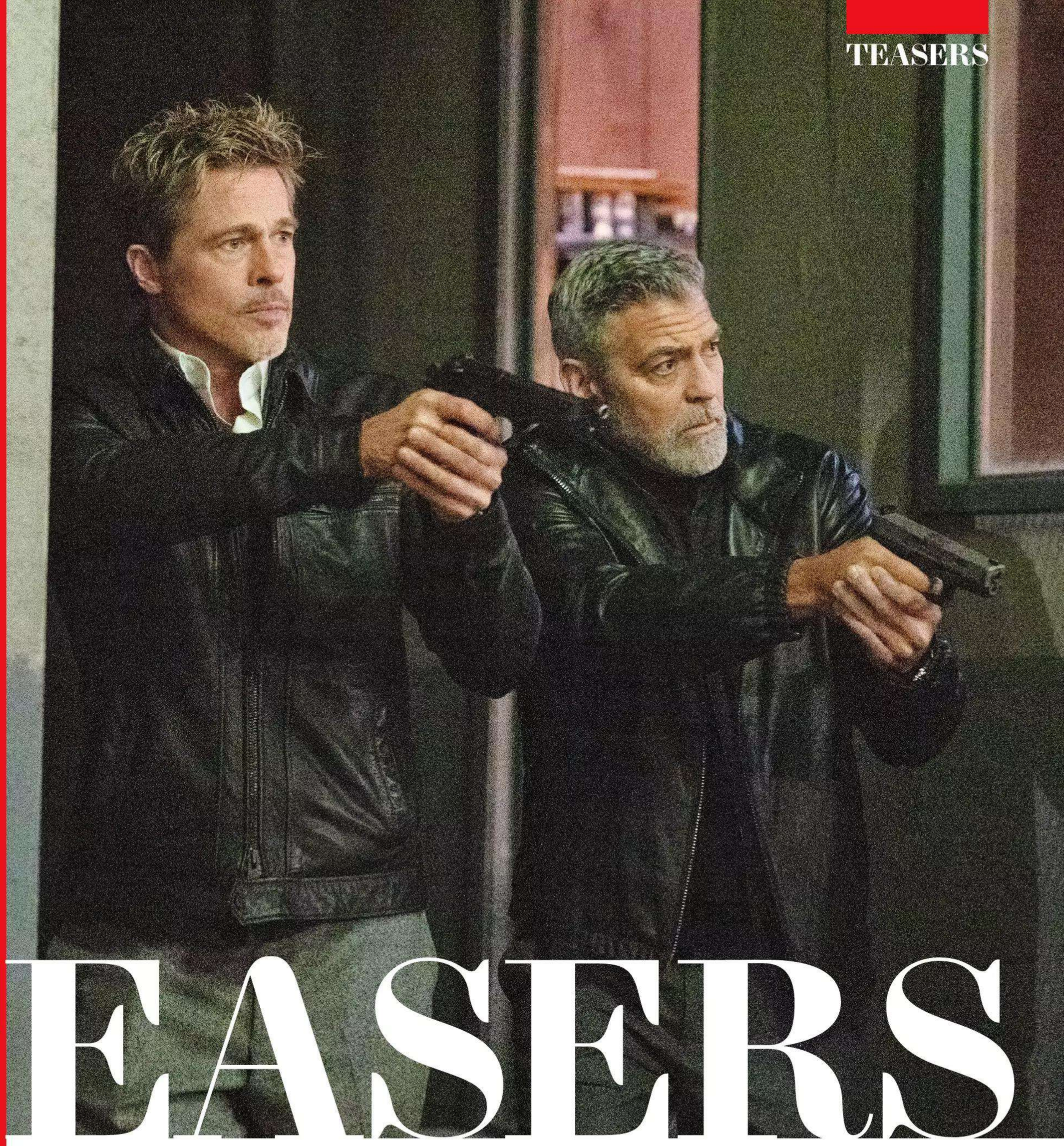


TEASERS

SLICK FIX

WOLFS Brad Pitt and George Clooney are lone-wolf fixers assigned to the same job...

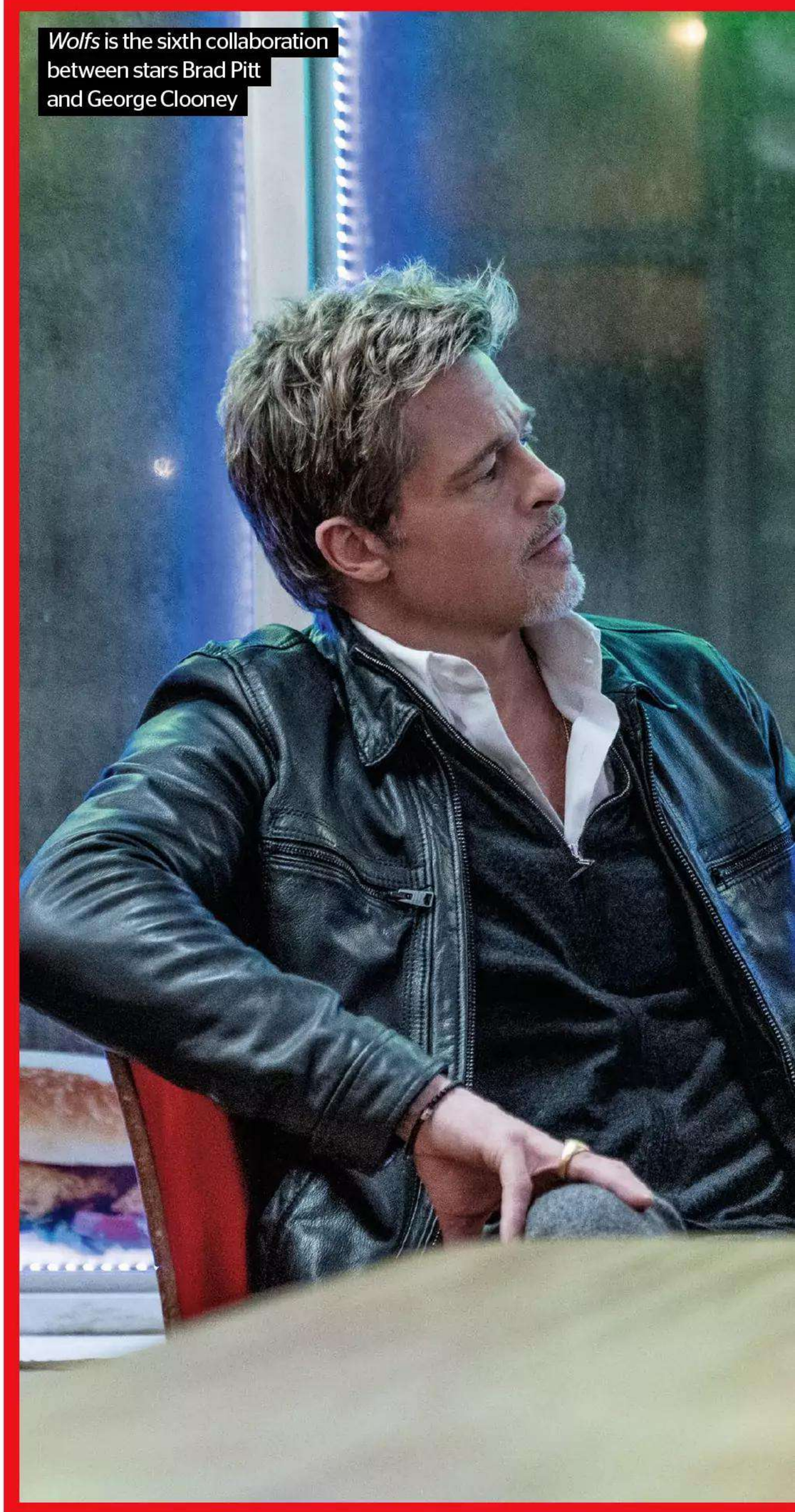
What happens when two very similar guys get thrown together in a strange twist of fate? That's the question at the core of *Wolfs*. To make things more interesting, those two guys also happen to be professional fixers tasked with disposing of the same body. Played by Hollywood royalty Brad Pitt and George Clooney – teaming up once again after collaborating on the Ocean's films, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* and *Burn after Reading* – the fixers are forced to work together, no matter how much they dislike the idea.

Drawing on the archetypal hitman and inspired by the likes of *Le Samouraï* and *La Femme Nikita*, writer/director Jon Watts (*Spider-Man: No Way Home*, *Cop Car*) was keen to find the humour in that situation. 'I wanted to see what it was like – would they be best friends? Would they kill each other? I thought of it as a character study of this relationship that we never really see.' The director quickly had two big names backing the movie, as he pitched it to Clooney and Pitt directly, to an overwhelmingly positive response.

'My pitch to George was, "What if Michael Clayton got stuck with another Michael Clayton?" – Michaels Clayton, I think is the plural of Michael Clayton. And he was like, "I get it. Let's do it,"' Watts recalls. Having envisaged the duo in the leading roles since the beginning, he wrote the script after his successful pitch, tailoring the characters to the stars. 'I will say when I gave them the script, I didn't specify who would play who. I let them figure that out on their own!'

The movie's grammatically incorrect title is a deliberate choice on Watts' part ('The amount of people that have completely seriously approached me and said, "You know, it's spelled 'wolves'," is pretty alarming!') that

Director Jon Watts (left) with his stars on set



Wolfs is the sixth collaboration between stars Brad Pitt and George Clooney

➳ reflects the 'loner' nature of the main characters. 'I like the idea of playing around with incorrect language,' he explains. 'For *Wolfs*, I thought, "It's two singular wolves and you put them together. They're not a pack. They're still two individuals."'

Both leads have played similar roles before – Clooney in the aforementioned *Michael Clayton* and Pitt in *Killing Them Softly* – and they were clearly perfect for *Wolfs*. 'They're guys who absolutely seem like they have everything under control,' the director exclaims. 'They're so cool, calm and collected. To watch that unravel is really fun. And it's the ability to balance the seriousness with the comedy. They can do both.'

Shooting a movie with Hollywood A-listers proved to be a pinch-me moment – even for someone who's directed various star-studded Marvel flicks. 'Off-camera they're just the two friendliest, funniest, most laid-back guys, but then when you look through the lens at them, they're larger-than-life, iridescent movie stars. You just have to pinch yourself every once in a while when you're framing up a shot and you're like, "That's fucking Brad Pitt, man; that's fucking George Clooney."'

Shooting with stars of their calibre comes with its challenges, as the director recalls battling paparazzi alongside New York's harsh winter weather during night shoots: 'You can't shut down the streets. So in-between takes there's just a whole army of photographers surrounding you, taking flash photos of Brad and George.'

Wolfs takes place over the course of a night, situating the action in the city's dark underbelly. 'It was freezing,' the director says of the shoot. 'I met Amal [Clooney] for the first time in this urine-soaked alley in Chinatown filled with rats. I was like, "This is not where this should be happening!"'

The third major player in the action comedy is Austin Abrams (*Euphoria*, *Paper Towns*). He, too, was Watts' first choice for his character. 'I've watched everything that he's been in, and he's never really had a chance to really show off what he can do,' he explains. 'I needed someone who had the ability to do some crazy things in the movie, but also hold their own with these two giant movie stars, and not be intimidated. Austin was perfect.' While saying too much about his role would spoil things, Watts has nothing but praise for his commitment to the part. 'He just bravely ran through the streets of Chinatown in his tighty whities and his wet socks.' You'll have to watch the film for further context.

Having just directed three Spider-Man movies for Marvel, the director was keen to get stuck into something more grounded, but promises that *Wolfs* contains plenty of action. 'I was really excited to do action that didn't involve magic spells, or shooting webs, or multi-dimensional portals. I really tried to keep it all very realistic but still fun,' he says, elaborating that audiences can expect 'a big car chase, a bunch of shoot-outs, and no second unit. I wanted to shoot every single shot. It shouldn't just be Christopher Nolan who gets to do that!'

With cinemas dominated by franchise movies like those made by Marvel, it often seems that projects can no longer be sold on stars alone. That's a view that Watts refutes and hopes that *Wolfs* will disprove. 'People want to see great movies,' he says. 'People want to see movie stars, but the movie stars have to be in an interesting movie. I wanted *Wolfs* to be fun and theatrical and hopefully give a boost to original filmmakers out there.' **LAUREN MILES**

WOLFS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 20 SEPTEMBER.

'I wanted to shoot every single shot. It shouldn't just be Christopher Nolan who gets to do that!'
JON WATTS

Both of the film's stars have form for playing lone-wolf fixers

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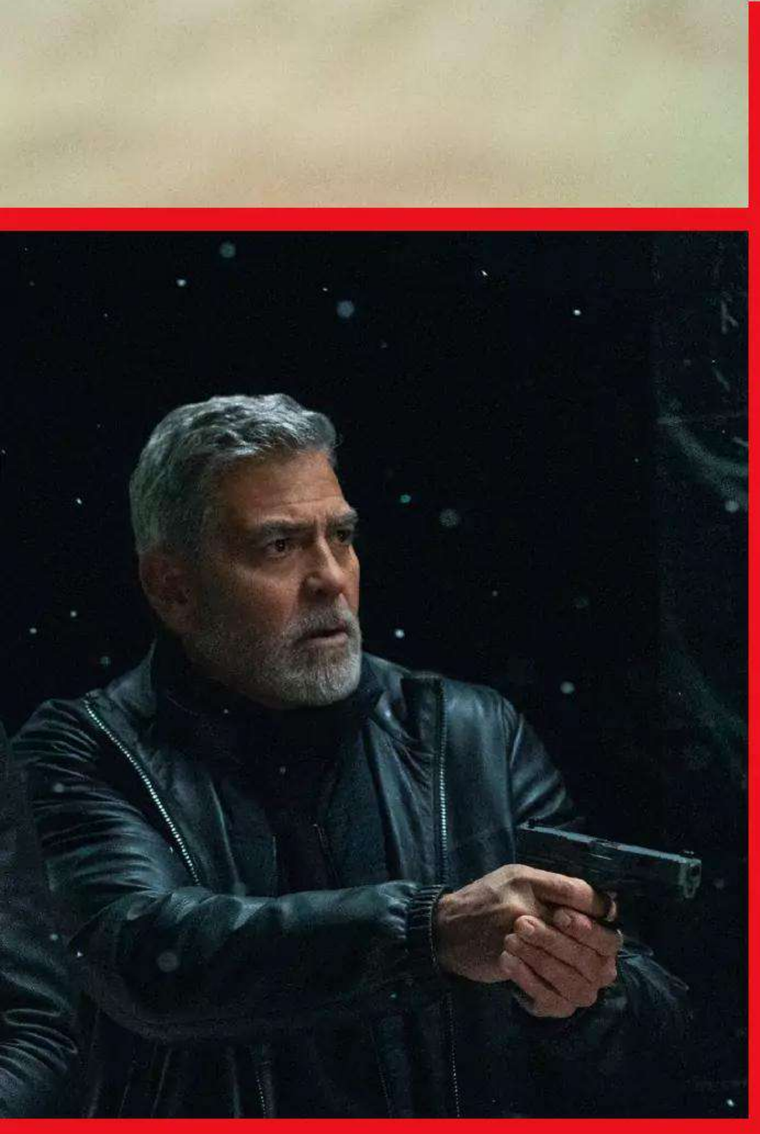

Pitt and Clooney's characters usually work alone, but are now thrown together

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ROBERT PATTINSON IS WORKING LIKE A MAN POSSESSED...

Since leaving behind the role of vampire Edward Cullen in 2012, Robert Pattinson has built himself a sparkling career. He may have gained worldwide recognition for acting in blockbuster franchises like Twilight and Harry Potter, but, much like the latter's leading man, the actor has gone on to choose extremely interesting projects. Most recently he's been attached to star alongside Jennifer Lawrence in Lynne Ramsay's *Die, My Love*, about an isolated mother struggling with her mental health. He's also returning to producing with a remake of the 1981 horror *Possession*.

The last time Pattinson produced was on 2010 romantic drama *Remember Me* – a largely forgotten entry in his early career. The fact that his filmography since is full of incredibly memorable projects is a credit to him as a performer and shows how far he's come. Even before The Twilight Saga ended he was working with huge names in the industry, starting with body-horror maestro David Cronenberg on *Cosmopolis* (2012) and *Maps to the Stars* (2014).

It's since become clear that Pattinson has a personal bingo card of directors he wants to work with. He must be close to winning; he's already been able to put a stamp on names like Werner Herzog (*Queen of the Desert*), Robert Eggers (*The Lighthouse*) and Christopher Nolan (*Tenet*). 'I've basically done stuff just for the director,' the actor said in a 2015 interview with *The Talks*. That doesn't seem to have changed much, as he's starring in Oscar-winning *Parasite* director Bong Joon-ho's *Mickey 17* at the start of next year.

While the majority of those names are more associated with arthouse cinema, Pattinson has also broken back into blockbuster filmmaking in a big way, donning the mask and cape for Matt Reeves' *The Batman*. The much-anticipated sequel is just one of the exciting things on his upcoming slate. It's clear that Pattinson feels the need for variety in his career, both in terms of collaborators and the kinds of projects he's joining. With more exciting, auteur-led movies on the horizon, he can't be far from filling up his bingo card. **LAUREN MILES**

MICKEY 17 OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 31 JANUARY 2025. THE BATMAN PART II OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 2 OCTOBER 2026. POSSESSION AND DIE, MY LOVE ARE TBC.

SWAN GALLET/WWD VIA GETTY IMAGES

Halle Berry plays a mother trying to keep her sons, Anthony B. Jenkins and Percy Daggs IV, safe

EXCLUSIVE

RESIDENTS, EVIL

NEVER LET GO Halle Berry defends her family in Alexandre Aja's latest terror-vision...

It was something I've never seen before, something with a lot of layers of interpretation,' says French filmmaker Alexandre Aja [*The Hills Have Eyes*] of receiving the script for *Never Let Go* in 2021. 'Also very scary. Not just [in a] genre [way], but also our relation to our children, to our parents, to faith...'

Never Let Go is indeed fresh. There are parallels to Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* or, more recently, *A Quiet Place*, but it's a strikingly original concept set in a heightened world. Our protagonists are a mother (Halle Berry) and her two boys (Anthony B. Jenkins, Percy Daggs IV) who live in a forest. Outside lurks The Evil, an apocalyptic menace that 'can wear many, many skins'. The house is blessed and therefore safe, and the family can stay safe when entering the forest by tying ropes around their midriffs, the other end attached to the house's foundations.

'I received the script when we were getting out of COVID-19,' says Aja when asked about the real-world themes of division and fear, loneliness and anger. 'It had an echo, but somehow an even bigger echo already in America, and the world right now, and in France even more. The original title was *Mother Land*. There was something about this society that's split between the one that believes and the one who doesn't believe. How can we make them talk? How can we also live with what we've been given by the past, become free and cut the rope?'

Shot in British Columbia, *Never Let Go* explores the evil outside and within. Hollywood execs like certainty, but Aja fought to retain ambiguity, building a world where 'this could be real or not real – both can exist.' He likens *Never Let Go* to a 'dark fairy tale from centuries ago' and insists that horror films are more vital now than ever before. 'Genre movies are something we need to explore this world,' he says. 'To survive it.' **JAMIE GRAHAM**

NEVER LET GO OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 27 SEPTEMBER.

LIONSGATE, RANDY HOLMES

Q&A

Halle Berry

Did the script's originality strike you?
Totally. This was a world that I had never seen. Fresh and new, mysterious and intriguing.

How did you find working with the boys?
They were so committed, so emotionally intelligent. Free. Huge imaginations. They weren't actor kids who have done a lot of theatre. And then we spent time together, like a little family.

It's a grounded, unglamorous performance from you, reminiscent of *Monster's Ball*. Is that scary or liberating?
Oh my god, so liberating. Like when I did *Jungle Fever*, for Spike Lee. I love to disappear inside of a character, leave all my inhibitions at the door. So much of moviemaking can be what you look like: changing lights; touching up make-up; 'Don't look that way, it's not a good angle...' With this, the more horrific you look, the better!

Did you relate to this woman hiding away? Being famous, it can be an ordeal just buying groceries...
I do hide away. A lot. After COVID-19, I gave myself permission to hide even more because I realised that I liked it. And as I've gotten older, I have less desire to be out in the world, and at 'things'. It's actually been a wonderful thing, for me and my family. **JG**

Kate Winslet plays war photographer Lee Miller

EXCLUSIVE

NO FILTER

LEE Kate Winslet produces and stars in a bold biopic about war photographer Lee Miller.

I can't exactly put my finger on it,' Kate Winslet says of when she first heard of war photographer Lee Miller. Famous for capturing scenes from the front lines and concentration camps during World War Two as *Vogue*'s war correspondent, Miller is a figure Winslet 'gradually became more aware' of throughout her life. Producing a film focusing on that portion of Miller's career, though, all started with a table. Contacted by a friend who owns an auction house, said friend told Winslet that she'd come into possession of a table owned by Miller's sister-in-law. 'She said, "You've just got to get it," and as I received it I sat down and put my hands on it and thought, "Lee Miller, what if I made a film about her? God, that'd be interesting." And that was the beginning.'

As the film got off the ground, Winslet turned to Ellen Kuras, who served as DoP on *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, to direct it. 'Kate and I had talked about Lee Miller, but she kept it under wraps that she was trying to develop this script!' Kuras exclaims, saying that the project was revealed to her in 2018, when Winslet asked her to helm it. She was all too happy to do so, calling Miller 'someone we can look at and revere, and take lessons from'.

While she's known for her war photography, that was a profession Miller only took up later in life. Before that, in the 1920s, she was a fashion model. Winslet and Kuras' movie crucially skips over that to focus on her later work during World War Two. 'The way that she's largely been defined is through the male gaze,' Winslet explains of the choice. 'She's a woman who's so often described as the muse of Man Ray, the ex-model, the cover girl – words that really a man comes up with simply because they don't know enough about her. I thought, "I can't have this woman's life just stop when she was more visibly available to the world." She hated being a model, and she famously said, "I'd rather take a photograph than be one."'

'We made a conscious effort to say, "We don't want to see her being objectified, we want to talk about how she got tired of being an object and decided to step around the other side of the camera,"' Kuras adds. The first-time narrative feature director draws a lot of comparisons between Winslet and Miller. 'She's bold, she's brash – in the same way that Lee was

'The way that she's largely been defined is through the male gaze'
KATE WINSLET

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Winslet on set with director Ellen Kuras

Even Kate Winslet found it hard to get financial backing for a film about a historical woman

Andy Samberg takes on the role of Miller's friend David Scherman

brash. She's outspoken. She's someone for whom the looks weren't the point. It's what you do and what you say that is the point. But also, she resembles Lee in an uncanny way!' It was clear to Kuras that Winslet was the right person to play Lee Miller.

It's a role that the actor herself was slightly intimidated by, especially with the responsibility that comes with playing a real person. 'It's a huge responsibility playing someone who had really existed, especially when their son is still alive and very much a part of the creative process, which Tony [Penrose] was,' Winslet explains. But she adds that playing Miller was also a liberating experience. 'I just had to meet it head on and totally submerge myself in the experience. I've also kind of let go of any of my own inhibitions in playing her because she was so physically free.'

Starring alongside her is Andy Samberg as fellow war photographer and Lee Miller's lifelong friend David Scherman. It's an uncharacteristically solemn role for Samberg, best known for his comedy work in the likes of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, but Winslet has nothing but praise. 'He just got it. And he was really nervous and couldn't get out of his head that audiences would expect him to be doing funny things all the time,' the actor recalls. 'I just had to keep reminding him that doing nothing with your face sometimes is equally as impactful as raising an eyebrow! When you're a comedian it becomes punctuation, and so for him actually training his face not to do that was the hardest part.'

It's clearly a project that means a lot to Winslet, and it's one she's had to fight for. 'People assume that [it's easy] because I've been in this industry for a long time, won an Oscar – it doesn't make any fucking difference when you are making a film about a historical female figure,' she explains. 'There was a backer who said to me, "Why am I supposed to like this woman?" And I thought, "Well, you're not going to be part of our film, so fuck you." Actually, that was great – to be able to just go, "We're only going to make it with nice people who understand the story we're trying to tell."'

For Winslet and Kuras, Lee Miller isn't just a historical figure; she's a woman whose story still resonates today. 'I think that Lee is someone who shows us the determination of an individual to go and seek out the truth. That's so important today because the truth has been cast in doubt by many people,' Kuras explains. As for Winslet, she hopes that *Lee* will reshape Miller's legacy. 'I like the idea that hopefully, through making this film, we will redefine how people see her now – or perhaps meet her for the first time.' **LAUREN MILES**

Miller was a model before moving into photography later in life

LEE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 13 SEPTEMBER AND DEBUTS ON SKY CINEMA LATER THIS YEAR.

YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

FILM QUOTES POSE AS QUESTIONS. FILM STARS TRY TO COPE.

IN THE CROSSHAIRS THIS MONTH... COLIN HANKS

You talkin' to me?
I'm definitely not talking *at* you, which is very important for communication. I'm not really listening to what you're saying though because you're the one asking the questions. So I'm talking to you? For sure – but really, I'm talking to the wonderful readers of *Total Film*.

Why don't you tell me the story of your life?
A) I don't think we have enough time, and B) I don't believe you're a licensed psychiatrist so I can't do that – but if you're not going to charge me, I've got plenty of time!

Do you have an off switch?
I have a pretty definite off switch but I think others would call it a 'resting bitch face'. The off switch is very close to the nap switch. I tend to read to relax. I picked up golf lately, which has been a hilarious change but one that I've enjoyed.

Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?
At 6'1", unless we're talking about a stormtrooper the size of Chewbacca, then sure. I'm pretty tall. I'm also a lover, not a fighter.

How much can you know about yourself if you've never been in a fight?
I find fighting incredibly annoying. I remember being at a party in high school and someone saying, 'Tonight's so fun. Now all we gotta do is get into a fight!' I remember thinking, 'What an idiot' and never hung out with that guy again.

What do you wanna discuss now? My favourite colour?
That's easy – and this isn't pandering – it's British Racing Green. It's a glorious colour; so flawless. It's very specific. Unfortunately, they don't make a lot of American cars in British Racing Green.

What will you be drinking, sir?
That's constantly changing. I love a good tequila but I also love a good whiskey – and if I'm feeling a little different, I love a good Dark and Stormy with ginger beer and rum. Those tend to be my three.

What are you afraid of?
Being bored. In childhood, boredom is healthy because it's how you discover your passions. The older I've got, I've discovered I don't want to be bored; I want to pick up new stuff as I go along. Strangely, life is a lot like acting: you're never going to get to the point where you're like, 'I know everything I need to know.'

Is life always this hard, or is it just when you're a kid?
I didn't always know what I wanted to do when I was a kid. I always had an idea of a couple of options but truth be told, none of them were as fun as make-believe and doing theatre in school. That was how I approached it and it ended up being the right call.

With Aisling Bea in *And Mrs* (top) and as Fred Rogers in *Drunk History*

Why do you do it? Why get up? Why keep fighting?
Quite frankly, my kids – and I don't mean that to sound altruistic. If I don't get up then stuff doesn't get done.

We all go a little mad sometimes, haven't you?
I'm a father so pretty much any little thing can set me off at a moment's notice. From, 'Why doesn't the clicker work all of a sudden?' to, 'Why does it have to be so loud?' I get angry but I've been trying to get in touch with my anger a little more. People think it's so important to be in touch with your emotions and I was reminded recently that anger is also an emotion. It's all about how you channel it, that's the key.

Do you feel lucky, punk?
Oh, one of the luckiest, I can't deny that. But I also like to think that life requires more than just luck. It also requires being in the right place at the right time with the right attitude, knowing how lucky you are and trying to remind yourself how good you have it.

Do you have a mixtape coming out?
You're talking to the guy who made the Tower Records documentary so there's lots of music in my household. I listen to a little bit of everything and I actually make mixtapes on cassette, because that's how silly I am.

What's normal anyways?
It's a good question. What's nice is how we seem to be getting closer to the understanding that there is no real normal and that's alright. Being different can be normal. I think if more people understood that, then maybe we'd be in a much better circumstance than we find ourselves in.

Cake? Isn't that your weakness?
Cake's a weakness, but in the great debate of 'cake vs pie' why don't we do both? Let pie be the weakness as well. As my friend Retta from *Parks and Recreation* would say, 'Treat yo'self!' **SIMON BLAND**

AND MRS IS ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS FROM 2 SEPTEMBER.

QUESTIONS TAKEN FROM: TAXI DRIVER, WHEN HARRY MET SALLY, DEADPOOL, STAR WARS: EPISODE IV - A NEW HOPE, FIGHT CLUB, A FEW GOOD MEN, THE SHINING, CREED, LEON: THE PROFESSIONAL, THE MATRIX REVOLUTIONS, PSYCHO, DIRTY HARRY, BLACK PANTHER, FORREST GUMP, JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

GETTY, ALAMY

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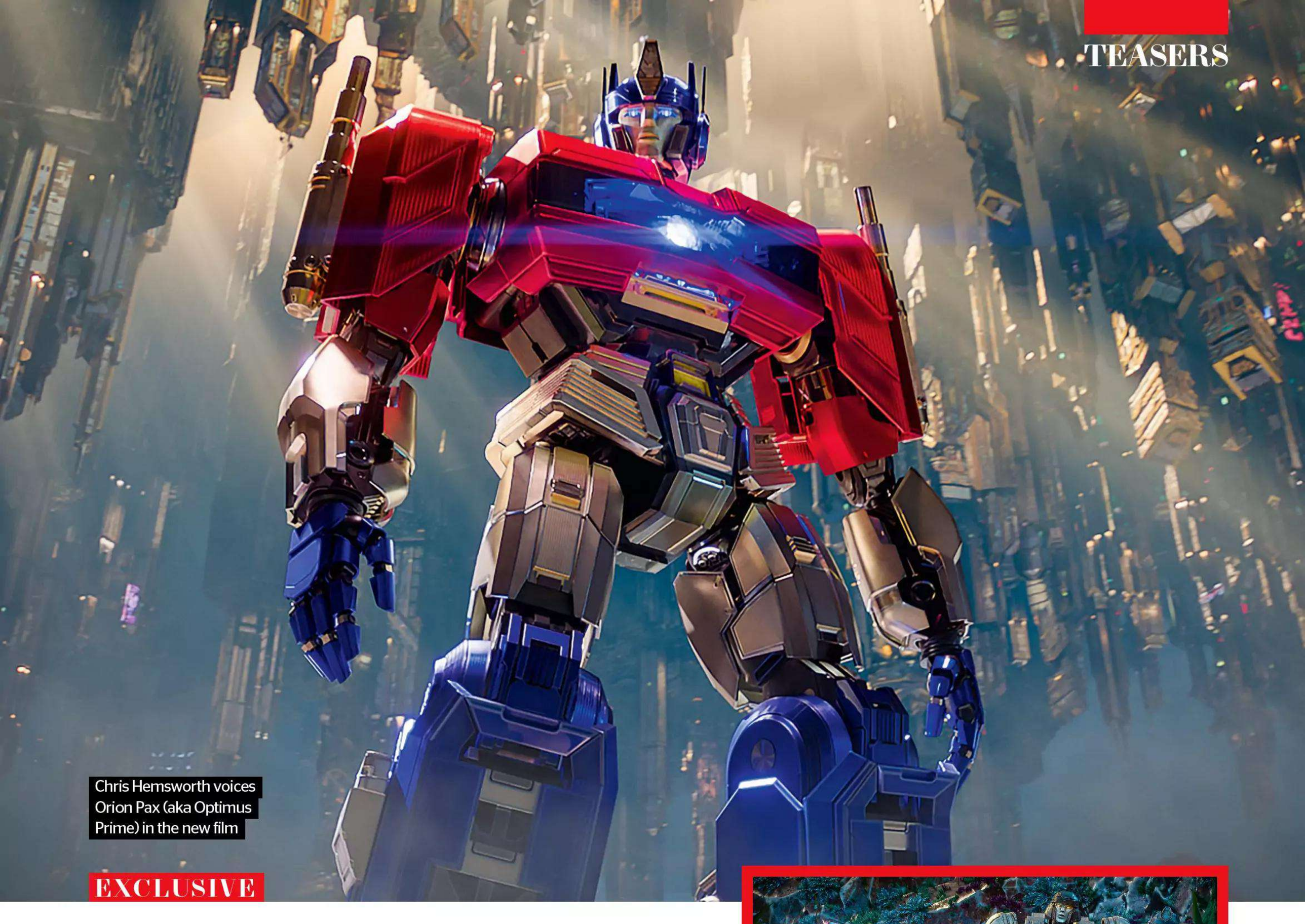

Chris Hemsworth voices Orion Pax (aka Optimus Prime) in the new film

EXCLUSIVE

PRIME TIME

TRANSFORMERS ONE Best friends become sworn enemies in this animated prequel.

There's more than meets the eye to the Transformers' backstory

Transformers One **marks the first time since 1986's TV-series spin-off that the shapeshifting robots have graced the big screen in animated form. Producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura and director Josh Cooley tell *Teasers* about their friends-to-enemies origin story…**

What makes now a good time for a Transformers prequel?
Josh Cooley: The other films have created the story of once [the Autobots and Decepticons] get to Earth, and the massive war that's going on. The thing that makes this special is you're seeing where that relationship came from. What got me interested was it was on Cybertron [their home planet] with no humans.
Lorenzo di Bonaventura: It's so hard to find a story that really is about the characters. The plot is 'What's going to happen between these two guys, Orion Pax and D-16 [who eventually become Optimus Prime and Megatron]?'

Why did you decide to make this an animated film?
LdB: You couldn't tell the story in live-action. In live-action we have to restrict the amount the robots are talking because it costs a ton of money. Now you can let them talk. Bumblebee [Keegan-Michael Key] can't shut up!

The animation style is really interesting, with 3D characters and 2D-looking backgrounds. How did you decide on that?
JC: One of the things I was concerned about from the start was it's a metal planet with metal characters; how do you not lose track of where everybody is? So it was on purpose that we made the backgrounds simpler.

We're used to seeing D-16 as the villain Megatron. Was it hard to figure out who he was if not a villain?
LdB: That's one of the things that took the longest. For both D-16 and Orion Pax we'd keep writing them like Megatron and Optimus, then read it and go, 'Well, no, that's not right.' It took a lot of iterations to get rid of our sense of who they are and look at it from the point of view of 'How do you build them to who you know they are?'
JC: I wanted people that aren't familiar with Transformers to go into this film and not even know who the villain was. It's not just, 'I'm bad; I do bad things.' You understand why he became that.

'In live-action we have to restrict the amount the robots are talking – now Bumblebee can't shut up!'
LORENZO DI BONAVENTURA

Is it right that this is meant to be the first movie in a trilogy?
LdB: I usually don't look ahead, but when we thought about the core story of two best friends falling apart, the next two movies just immediately came out of our mouths. We know what the most important moment is for the next two, and that's all we really know.

LAUREN MILES

TRANSFORMERS ONE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 11 OCTOBER.

PARAMOUNT

If you don't mask you don't get: Robert Downey Jr. has been cast as uber-villain Doctor Doom

CONVENTION ROUND-UP

FAN SERVICE

SDCC The biggest announcements and appearances at San Diego Comic-Con 2024.

Like many years previously, Marvel was the studio to steal the spotlight at this year's Comic-Con, impressing with a barrage of theatrical presentations in the famous Hall H. The undeniable highlight of the proceedings revolved around announcing the title and new villain of the upcoming fifth Avengers outing – a film that's been in a spot of trouble since Jonathan Majors' Kang the Conqueror was removed from future plans following legal woes surrounding the actor.

Now we know that the movie will be titled *Avengers: Doomsday*, with famous Fantastic Four villain Doctor Doom returning to the screen to wreak havoc on the multiverse. And, presumably, this instalment in the long-running series will be set in an alternate universe, as the familiar face playing Doom was unmasked on stage in a surprise reveal – it's none other than Robert Downey Jr.

'New mask, same task,' the Oscar-winning actor said as he received rapturous applause. But hang on. 'Didn't he play Iron Man? Didn't Iron Man die?' you may be asking. Well, yes, but in a multiverse of infinite possibilities, it seems the Avengers will be facing a foe that looks astonishingly like a fallen comrade.

Downey Jr. isn't the only familiar face returning to the Marvel universe.

'My wife thinks I look like [Red Hulk] all the time, so it was not that big a deal'
HARRISON FORD

Studio head Kevin Feige seems to be taking cues from the franchise's early success, bringing back individuals who are well-versed in making the superhero movies. Confirming the recent rumours, directors Joe and Anthony Russo, collectively known as the Russo Brothers, walked onto the Hall H stage to confirm that they'll be helming not just *Avengers: Doomsday*, but also its follow-up – *Avengers: Secret Wars*. The team-up movies are due for release in May 2026 and May 2027 respectively. 'Joe and I truly believed *Avengers: Endgame* was the end of the road for us. In the time since, through a special story, we have come to potentially see a road to take with you all,' Anthony Russo explained of their surprising return.

We also learned a lot more about Marvel's next theatrical release – *Captain America: Brave New World*. Due for release on 14 February 2025, it was a pleasant surprise to see Harrison Ford (who's playing Thaddeus Ross) not only

ALAMY, GETTY

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Captain America: Brave New World cast members Tim Blake Nelson, Danny Ramirez, Harrison Ford and Giancarlo Esposito

turn up to the event, but seemingly have a great time, too. After making his first CC appearance in handcuffs in 2010 – the joke being he had to be forced to attend – it was great to see the actor doing his best Red Hulk impression on the stage. 'I think my wife thinks I look like that all the time, so it was not that big a deal,' Ford exclusively told *Total Film* of seeing himself as the Red Hulk. More was also revealed about Giancarlo Esposito's villain, now confirmed to be the King of the Serpent Society, Sidewinder.

Marvel's first family were flown onto the stage via a bright blue Fantasticar, as Vanessa Kirby, Joseph Quinn, Ebon Moss-Bachrach and Pedro Pascal were in attendance for *The Fantastic Four: First Steps*' title announcement. The audience were also treated to a 60s-style video of the crew suiting up for a space mission, including a tease of villain Galactus. Quinn, who's playing Johnny Storm, said he wants to bring 'a feeling of family' to the MCU with the film, while Moss-Bachrach told the crowd that Hulk actor Mark Ruffalo sent him a text which was 'long and generous, simplifying motion capture', ahead of him playing Thing.

The cast of *Thunderbolts** also seemed to have a good time, with David Harbour arriving in full Red Guardian regalia. A trailer shown for the movie featured his character Alexei reuniting with Florence Pugh's Yelena, who then run into other characters like Sebastian Stan's Bucky Barnes and Wyatt Russell's John Walker. Once they realise they're being sent out on dangerous missions, they want to find out why. 'We get to go to a lot of great places and it was a joy,' Harbour said of making the film. Stan, meanwhile, pointed to Pugh when asked what stands out about the movie. **LAUREN MILES**

David Harbour showed up in costume to tease *Thunderbolts**

TV

Marvel dominated movie announcements, but there's plenty of exciting TV coming our way. On the horizon is *Vought Rising*, a 1950s-set prequel to *The Boys* starring Jensen Ackles' Soldier Boy (above) and Aya Cash's Stormfront. 'It's a twisted murder mystery about the origins of Vought in the 1950s, the early exploits of Soldier Boy, and the diabolical manoeuvres of a Supe known to fans as Stormfront,' said series creator Eric Kripke.

The showrunners of Prime Video's *The Rings of Power* answered questions about the upcoming second season, saying that Galadriel and Sauron have plenty of 'chemistry' despite being on parallel paths. They also revealed they're working on Season 3 as we speak. Sauron actor Charlie Vickers teased a bit about his character's mindset: 'I think I can get her to join me,' he said of Morfydd Clark's Galadriel.

Norman Reedus and the rest of the cast were at the panel for *The Walking Dead* spin-off *Daryl Dixon*. With S2 subtitled *The Book of Carol*, Reedus said, 'Part of [Daryl] wonders, "Has he been gone so long? Have they forgotten about him?" There's a cosmic energy between him and Carol but he's losing that feeling.' A Season 3 renewal was also announced. **LAUREN MILES**

Marvel brains trust: Joe and Anthony Russo with Kevin Feige

The Fantastic Four joins the MCU

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BETWEEN TAKES

MACKENZIE DAVIS

THE *SPEAK NO EVIL* STAR ON TRAYS AND SILICON FLESH...

What's the first thing you do when you arrive on set?
I will usually have my lunch and three to five drinks with me, so I deposit those in their respective places. I don't need a lot of downtime, so I like to go right into hair and make-up. And I like to yell at the crew on the first day, just to establish dominance!

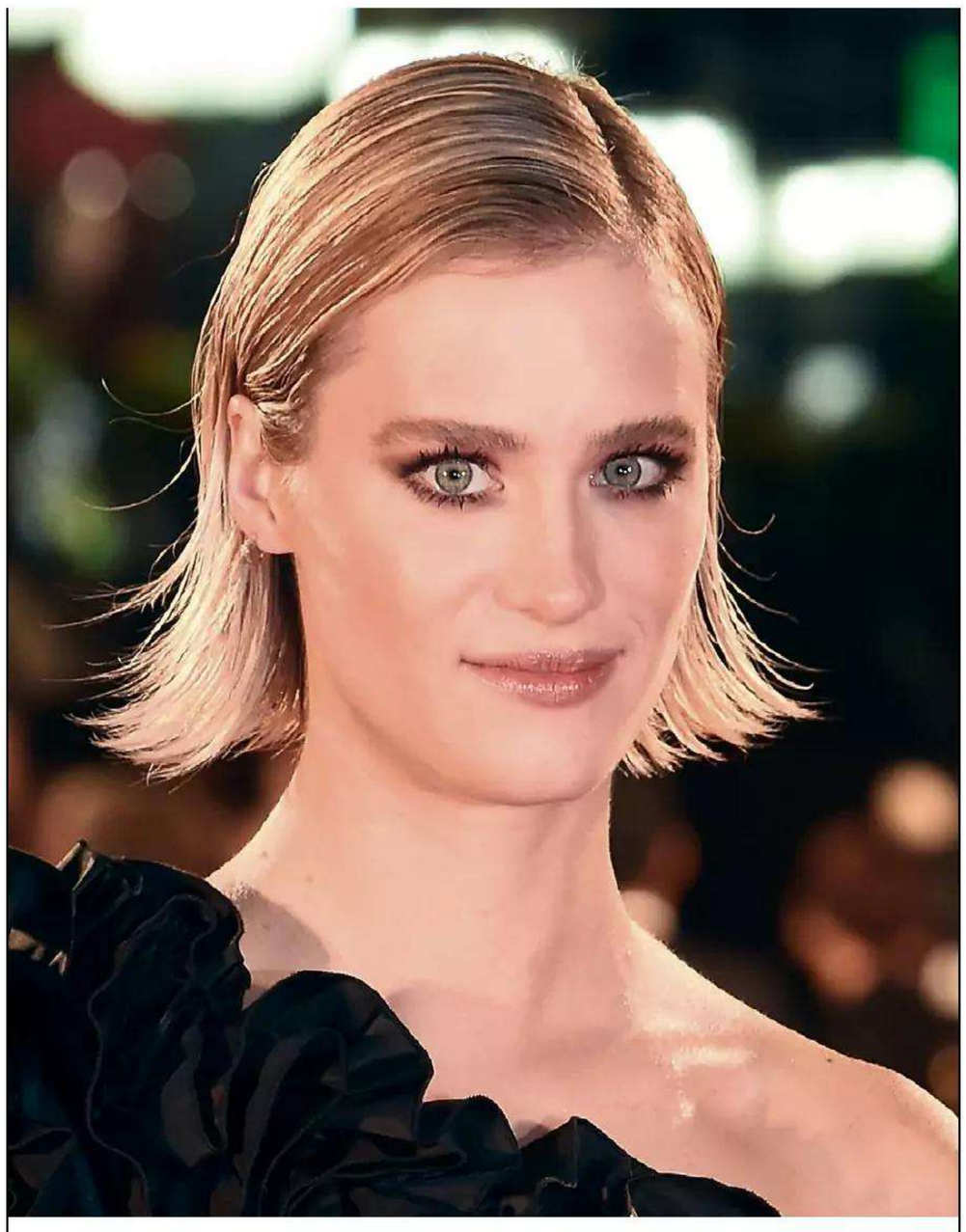
What do you take on set with you?
I always have a book with me; I can't retain anything from a Kindle, so it has to be a physical book. I also have to do the *New York Times* crossword every day; that's the only time, though, that I want to be on my phone.

How did the *Speak No Evil* set compare to others?
It was really nice, because we shot chronologically; so much of the movie takes place at this farmhouse in Gloucester that we could shoot in story order. It was cool to be at this one farmhouse with very low ceilings for the duration of the shoot.

What's your earliest on-set memory?
The very first job that got me into the Canadian acting union was playing a bartender in a made-for-TV movie. I had to cross frame with a tray but I'd never been on set before; I was terrible at carrying a tray across the screen and felt like such a loser. There's such pressure when the simple thing you're doing can ruin everything.

What's your best on-set experience?
Shooting *Blade Runner 2049* was incredible as I felt like I was actually in a movie. That's one of the only times I've ever felt like there was a whole world we were stepping into.

What's your longest day on set?
When I was doing *Terminator: Dark Fate*, I had to work out every day and I had two to three hours of make-up every day so I was getting to work three hours before everyone else. I was spending a good 16 to 18 hours a day on set for that, pretty much every day. That was the only film I've done where I had a countdown clock on my phone showing how many days were left. I had so much fun doing it, but it felt like a marathon.



'SHOOTING *BLADE RUNNER 2049* WAS INCREDIBLE. I FELT LIKE THERE WAS A WHOLE WORLD WE WERE STEPPING INTO'

Davis with co-stars Alix West Lefler and Scoot McNairy in *Speak No Evil*

Do you keep accents between takes?
I stay in it as much as I need to but I try not to overdo it. I'm playing Scottish right now for a Netflix show called *The Undertow* so it flows in and out. At first you need to stay in it because it's new and feels kind of vulnerable. But now I feel like it comes and goes depending on what the conversation is. I told James [McAvoy] while we were shooting [*Speak No Evil*] I was going to do Scottish and we spoke about how hard it is and how many people have ruined it. I felt an enormous trepidation going into it, and I don't want to disappoint him!

Do you ever sleep on set?
It depends. I don't like to sleep in the trailer, because they get inhumanely hot. Taking a nap in a trailer is like taking a nap after six margaritas! But I will fall asleep by accident if I have to do any scene in bed. If I have to pretend to sleep or talk to someone in bed I will fall right asleep.

What's the best wrap party you've been to?
Happiest Season was really cute; we were all in Pittsburgh, everyone went and it was full of love. It was right before coronavirus shut the world down so we didn't know how lucky we had it.

What's the best end-of-shoot gift you've ever received?
At the end of *Speak No Evil*, Aisling Franciosi got me the most beautiful blanket; I love it so much and I think of her every time I see it. Another gift I had from my make-up artist on *Terminator* were these squares of fake flesh they would use on my body. I used to like to touch it, so I now have these pieces of silicon flesh in various cupboards in my house! **NEIL SMITH**

SPEAK NO EVIL OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 13 SEPTEMBER.

GETTY, SUSIE ALLNUTT

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Young-ass Elliott with her old-ass self

EXCLUSIVE

SELF CARE

MY OLD ASS Is Megan Park's comedy drama one of the year's must-see movies? You bet your ass...

In 2021, Canadian actor Megan Park (*Charlie Bartlett*, *Diary of the Dead*) garnered raves for her writing/directing debut *The Fallout*, a delicate high-school-shooting drama starring Jenna Ortega before she launched into the stratosphere. Now she follows it up with another excellent teen movie, *My Old Ass*, which starts off as a broad, fantastical comedy but subtly shifts through the gears until it packs a real punch.

'With *The Fallout*, it was, "How do I make something that's heavy really palatable?"' ponders Park. 'This movie, on the surface, doesn't have as heavy a subject matter, but the mushroom trip and the idea of meeting your older self is the entry point. People have come up to me and said, "I didn't expect to cry my face off in a movie called *My Old Ass*."'

Falling somewhere between *Booksmart* and *Petite Maman*, *My Old Ass* focuses on queer 18-year-old Elliott (Maisy Stella) in the weeks before she leaves her idyllic home in the sun-dappled Muskoka Lakes to head for college. Determined to spend her last days hooking up with a local girl and getting high with her mates, Elliott suddenly meets her 39-year-old self (Aubrey Plaza, bringing her signature sass but also earnest wisdom) after consuming 'shrooms. This old-ass version of Elliott offers advice, some of it expected (be nicer to your family, enjoy your youth), and some of it cryptic and concerning: 'Stay away from Chad.' Young-ass Elliott doesn't even know a Chad. Until, that is, she bumps into a charming guy (Percy Hynes White) on the lake whom she instantly connects with...

'As a teenager I was frustrated that a lot of stuff didn't feel authentic'
MEGAN PARK

Kerrice Brooks, Maisy Stella and Maddie Ziegler

'We were struck by Megan's voice, how she takes stories about young people so seriously and manages to tell them with such heart and humour,' says Bronte Payne, who produces alongside Margot Robbie, with whom she teamed previously on *Promising Young Woman* and *Saltburn*. Park modestly responds to the praise by sharing the kudos with her superb young cast: 'I spent years in front of the camera as a teenager, and I was constantly frustrated that a lot of stuff didn't feel authentic to what I was going through,' she says. 'I want to give autonomy to the young actors: "Would you actually say it that way? Would you wear that outfit?"'

A smash at Sundance, *My Old Ass* is funny, romantic and heart-wrenching, the kind of movie where you fall hard for the characters and want to watch again and again. The 'what if?' high concept, meanwhile, is guaranteed to spark post-viewing debate. So what would Park say to her own young ass? 'Don't rush life. Time goes by so quickly and only seems to go faster and faster the older you get. Just try to slow it down. Enjoy it all.' **JAMIE GRAHAM**

MY OLD ASS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 27 SEPTEMBER.

AMAZON STUDIOS, PRIME VIDEO, MARNI GROSSMAN

‘THERE ARE SO MANY CREDIBLE FEMALE ROLES WITHIN THIS GENRE NOW THAT THOSE ARE USUALLY THE MOST INTERESTING SCRIPTS THAT I’M READING.’

LONGLEGS STAR **MAIKA MONROE** ON WHY SHE KEEPS RETURNING TO HORROR.

‘The reality is, you’re in shapewear, you need to pee, you have commercial breaks, and that’s the only time that you’re able to do it. So it’s just a mad scramble.’

TURNS OUT AWARDS CEREMONIES AREN’T THAT FUN, AS **LILY GLADSTONE** COMPARES THE GOLDEN GLOBES TO *SQUID GAME*.

SOUND BYTES

The month in dialogue and digits.

41

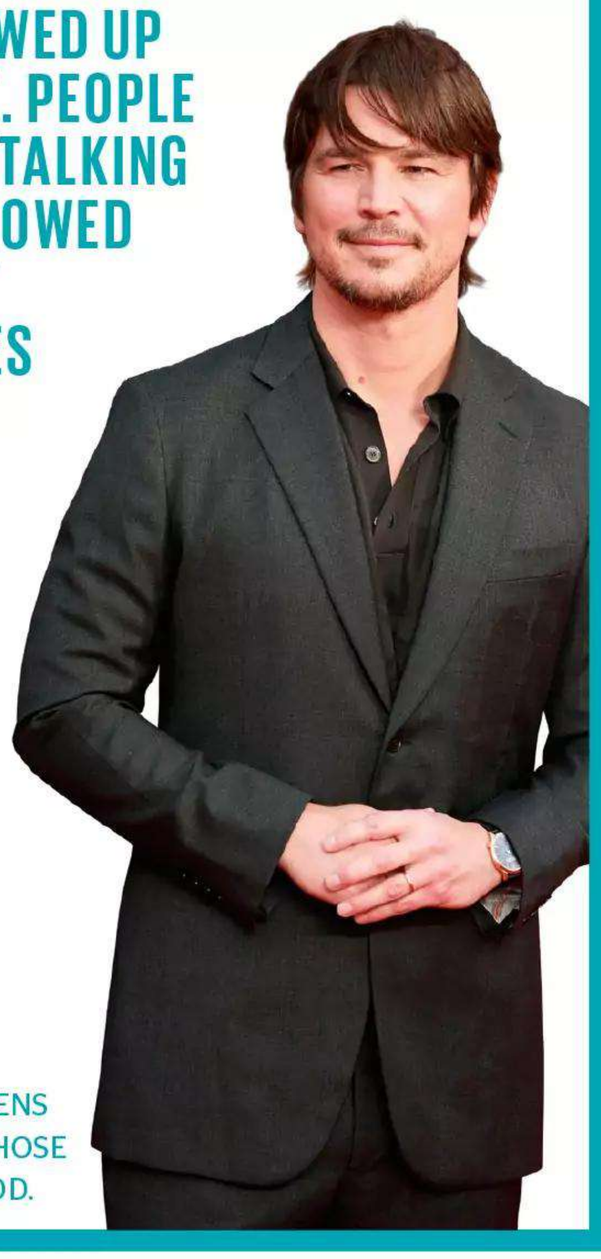
THE NUMBER OF YEARS **FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA** HAS SPENT WORKING ON PASSION PROJECT *MEGALOPOLIS*.

$5bn

THE AMOUNT THE **DESPICABLE ME/ MINIONS** FRANCHISE HAS EARNED AT THE GLOBAL BOX OFFICE.

‘PEOPLE SHOWED UP AT MY HOUSE. PEOPLE THAT WERE STALKING ME. A GUY SHOWED UP AT ONE OF MY PREMIERES WITH A GUN, CLAIMING TO BE MY FATHER. HE ENDED UP IN PRISON. THERE WERE LOTS OF THINGS. IT WAS A WEIRD TIME.’

JOSH HARTNETT OPENS UP ABOUT WHY HE CHOSE TO LEAVE HOLLYWOOD.



MARVEL JESUS

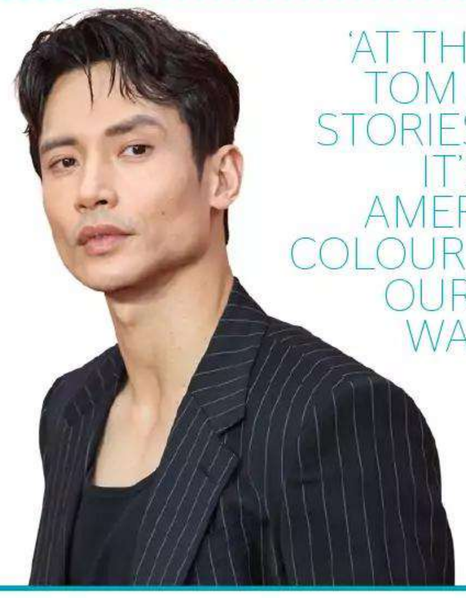
DEADPOOL & WOLVERINE BROKE GLOBAL BOX-OFFICE RECORDS ON ITS OPENING WEEKEND.

GOOD THING

BAD THING

RIP

LEGENDARY PRODUCER JON LANDAU (*TITANIC*, *AVATAR*) HAS DIED AGED 63.



‘AT THE END OF THE DAY, TOM CRUISE IS WRITING STORIES FOR TOM CRUISE. IT’S UP TO US – ASIAN AMERICANS, PEOPLE OF COLOUR – TO BE THAT [FOR OURSELVES]. WE CAN’T WAIT FOR SOMEBODY ELSE TO DO IT.’

MANNY JACINTO ISN’T SURPRISED HIS LINES WERE CUT FROM *TOP GUN: MAVERICK*.

‘I’M 86 AND I WAKE UP IN THE MORNING AND GO, “OH, I’M STILL HERE.” I HAVE A SENSE OF MISCHIEF ABOUT IT.’

ANTHONY HOPKINS IS GLAD TO STILL BE AROUND AND ACTING AT 86 YEARS OF AGE.

ALAMY, GETTY

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5 THINGS

ALL THAT GLITTERS

JOAN Sophie Turner plays notorious jewel thief Joan Hannington in ITV's latest drama.

1 IT'S BASED ON A TRUE STORY

Joan Hannington is a real figure, and the series is based on her 2002 memoir *I Am What I Am: The True Story of Britain's Most Notorious Jewel Thief*. 'When I read the book I was really drawn into just what this person had been through,' says series director Richard Laxton, who came across it when looking for material to adapt for the small screen. 'I first met her in pre-production. [She was] this extraordinary force of nature and character, and emotionally honest.'

2 JOAN'S MUCH MORE THAN A THIEF

She's a complex protagonist with a troubled past that pushes her into a life of crime. That's part of what drew Laxton to her story. 'I'm interested in the human condition and why we behave like we do,' he explains. 'I was so compelled by this woman who has a child who she loves, but for the sake of the child's safety gives her up, and the struggle of wanting to get her back, and to try and prove that she can be a good mum, to her and the establishment.'

3 THEY GOT CREATIVE WITH THEIR LOCATIONS

The production was based in Birmingham ('It's cheaper than shooting in London!') but that often meant having to disguise the city as England's capital. 'We had to be really canny in trying to find bits of streets we could redress for London,' the director recalls. 'And make hotel interiors into stately homes so they felt posh.' They also shot along the Kent coast at Herne Bay, which 'had a nostalgia and a kind of chill – it can feel very bleak and magical at the same time.'

'I'm interested in the human condition and why we behave like we do'
RICHARD LAXTON

4 THE DIRECTOR CAST TURNER WITHOUT WATCHING *GAME OF THRONES*

'Well, I saw one episode,' amends Laxton. 'So she wasn't really on my radar.' Her first self tape certainly changed that. 'I looked at it and I went, "God, that's really good."' Then the director challenged her to a second self tape, this time tackling a more emotional scene. 'It was extraordinary, and she was completely without make-up and extraordinarily raw. I Zoomed her and said, "Look, I just want you to play it."'

5 TURNER WORKED EXTREMELY HARD

This being her first major role since 2022 series *The Staircase*, Turner reportedly threw herself into playing Joan wholeheartedly. 'We did a long drive up to Birmingham and she was asking all the right questions,' Laxton recalls. 'She fluffed two lines in 90 days of shooting. She was in every day and in make-up really early. She's a powerhouse.' **LAUREN MILES**

JOAN LAUNCHES ON ITV1 AND ITVX THIS SEPTEMBER.

Sophie Turner as Joan Hannington

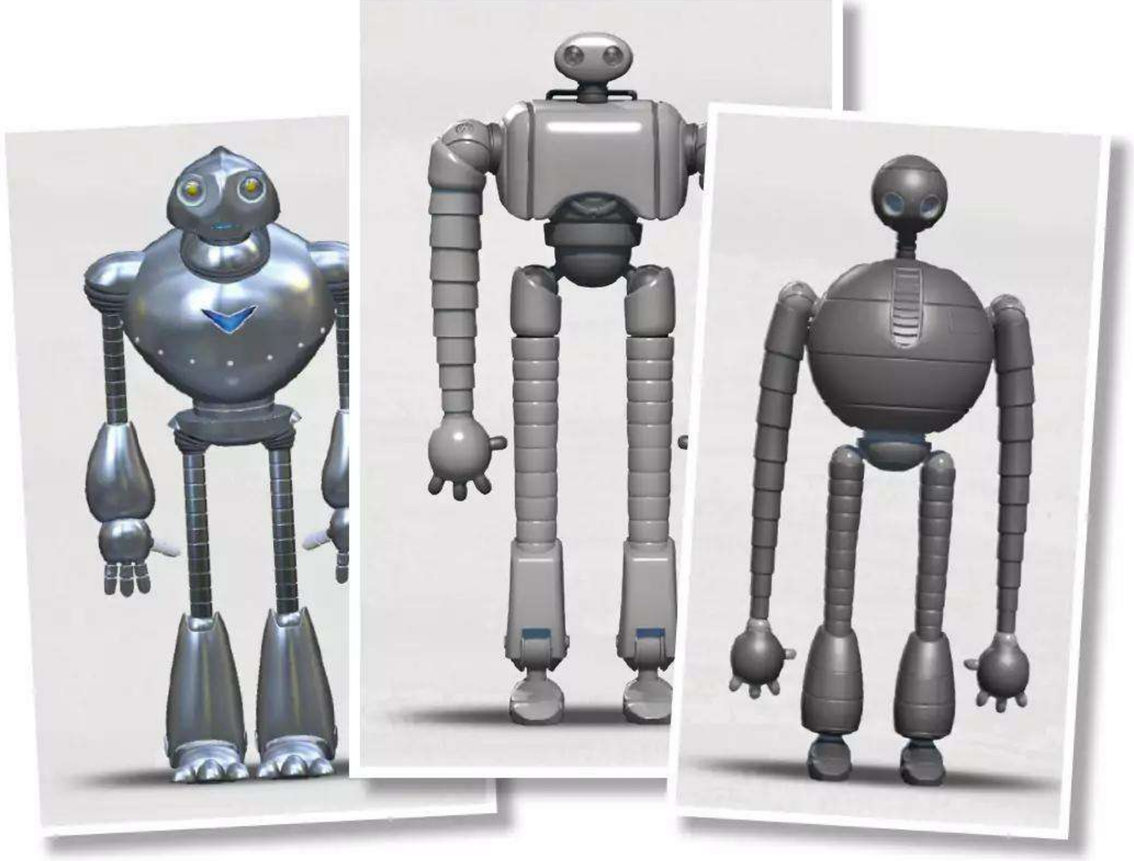
ITV

EXCLUSIVE

NUTS AND BOLTS

THE WILD ROBOT Animation maestro Chris Sanders on his latest charming project.

Look at Chris Sanders' filmography and you'll find some of the most memorable non-human characters in animation, like Stitch from *Lilo & Stitch*, *How to Train Your Dragon*'s Toothless and *The Croods*' sloth Belt. Next up is Roz, the title character in *The Wild Robot*, which is adapted from the children's book by American writer/illustrator Peter Brown. Roz – or ROZZUM unit 7134 – is washed ashore on an island devoid of people, where she gradually learns to adapt to living in the elements…



ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

'One of the wonderful gifts that Peter [Brown], I think inadvertently, gave us is a design for Roz that is both specific and vague,' writer/director Sanders tells *Teasers*. 'She's very humanoid. She has very clear proportions. But as far as the details, he's left that in his own style.' Brown's idea was that the ROZZUM would be able to take on various human jobs, hence the shape. 'That said, we could play with her proportions and her details. And we wanted her to stay clean, simple and memorable.'

DREAMWORKS ANIMATION, UNIVERSAL

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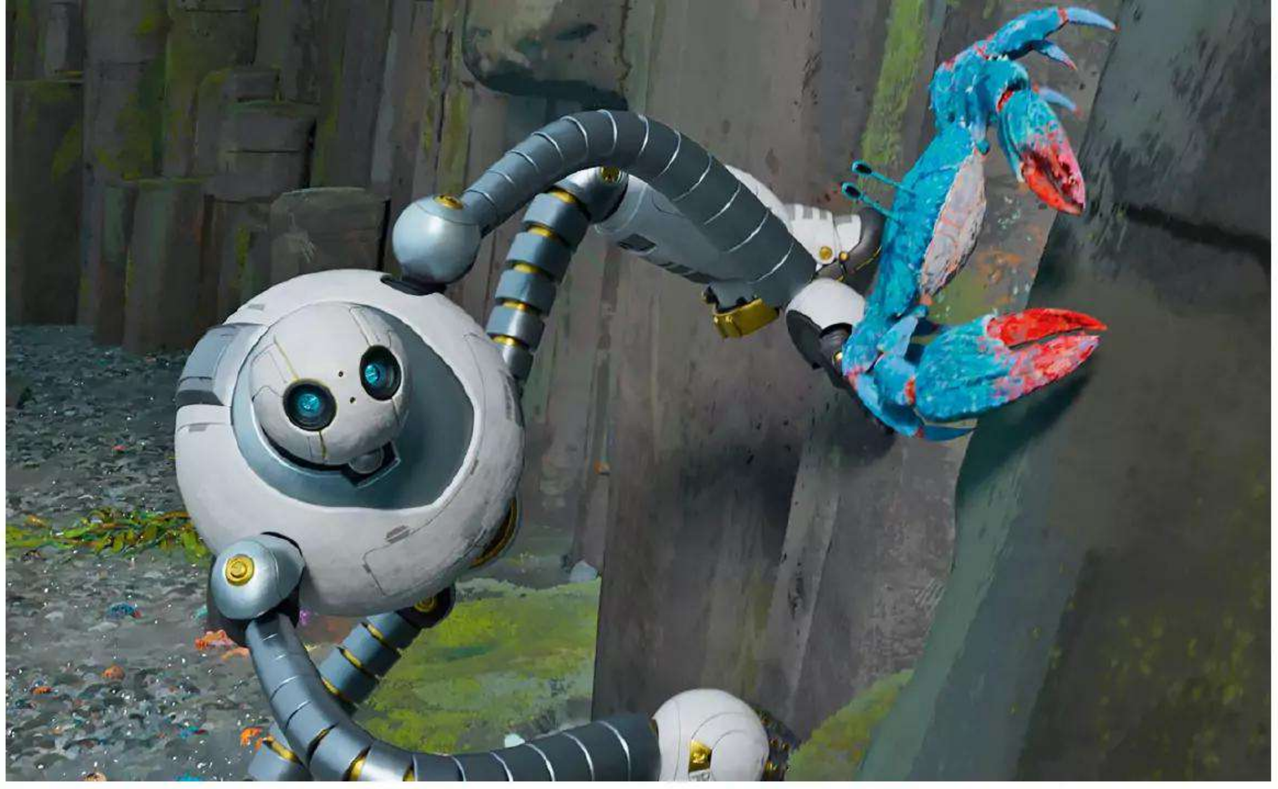
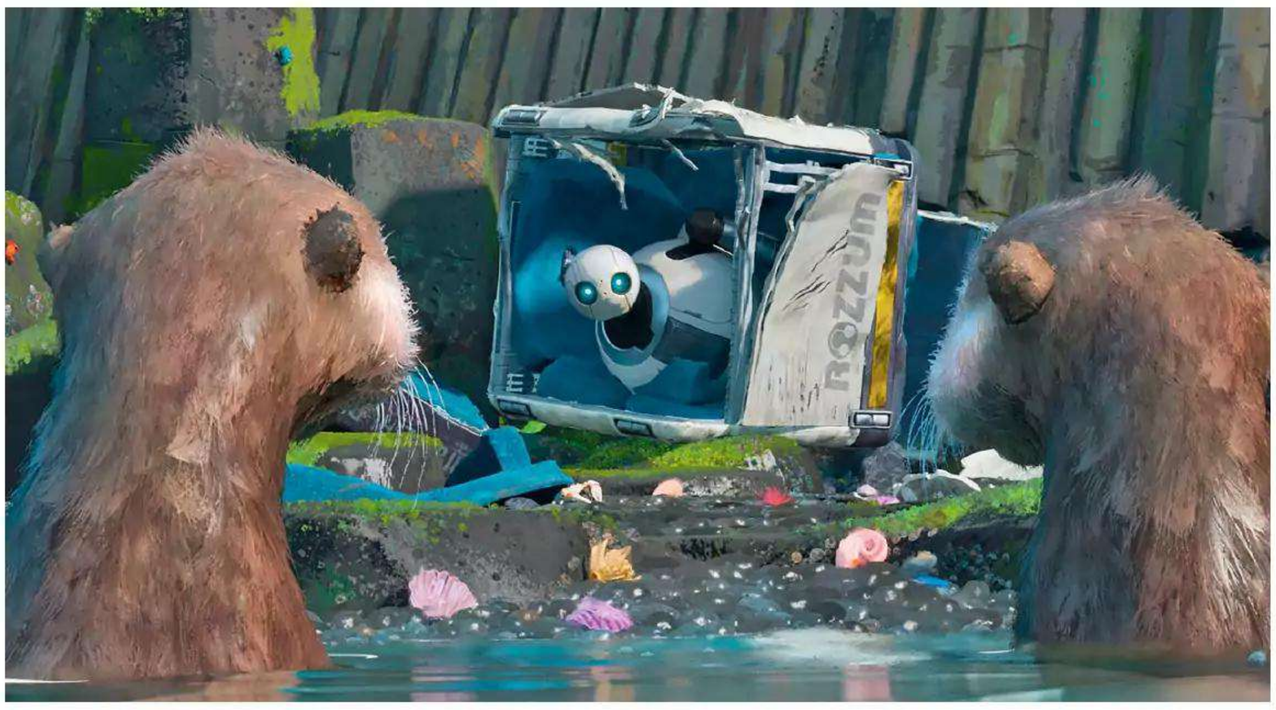


POETRY IN MOTION

Teasers was treated to an assemblage of footage from *The Wild Robot*. Whether she's scaling a cliff like a crab, galloping like a deer or just whirling and whirring chaotically, Roz's movements stand out. 'I have to credit our engineers, our riggers, our designers, and our animators,' says Sanders. 'We were looking for a robot that would be satisfying when she was on screen and could do surprising things. The lead on Roz, a guy named Fabio [Lignini], he did some early tests with her where he would roll her up into balls, and just move her, and turn her in utterly unique ways that were delightful.'

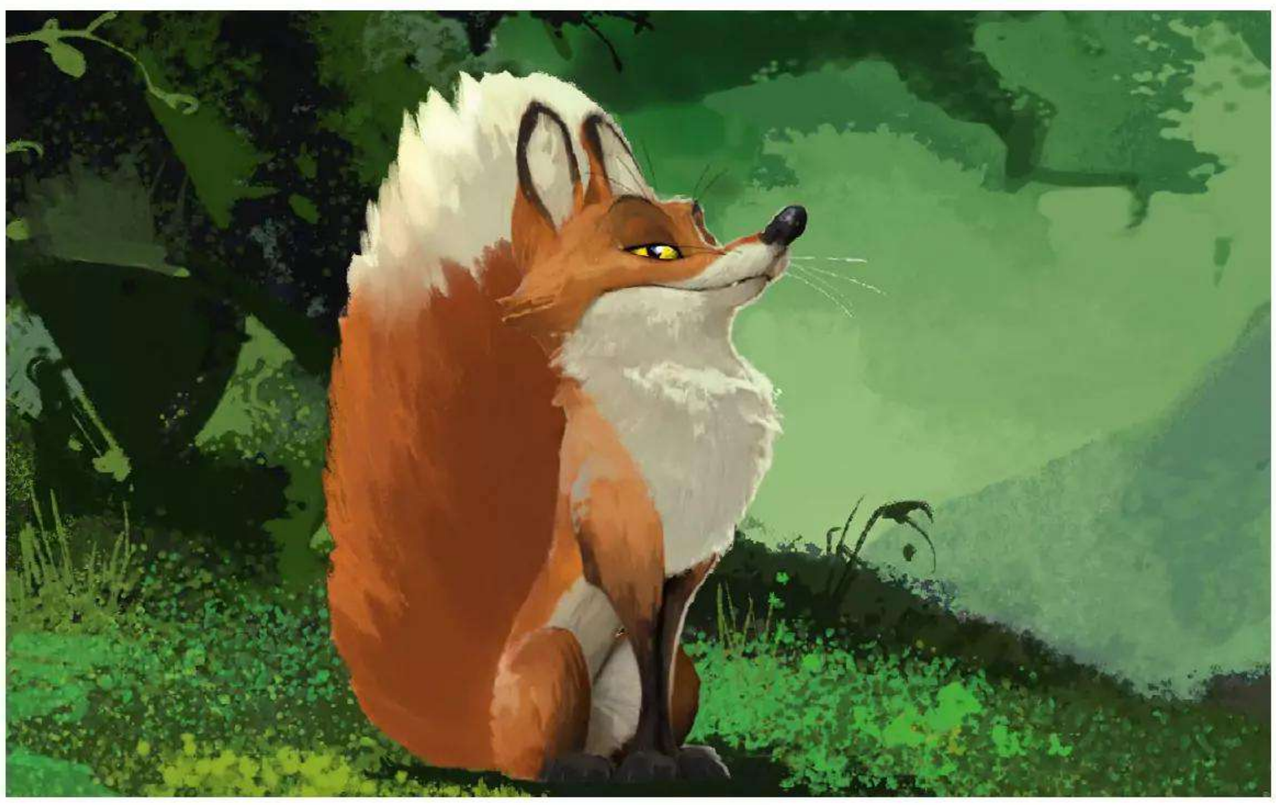
THE EYES HAVE IT

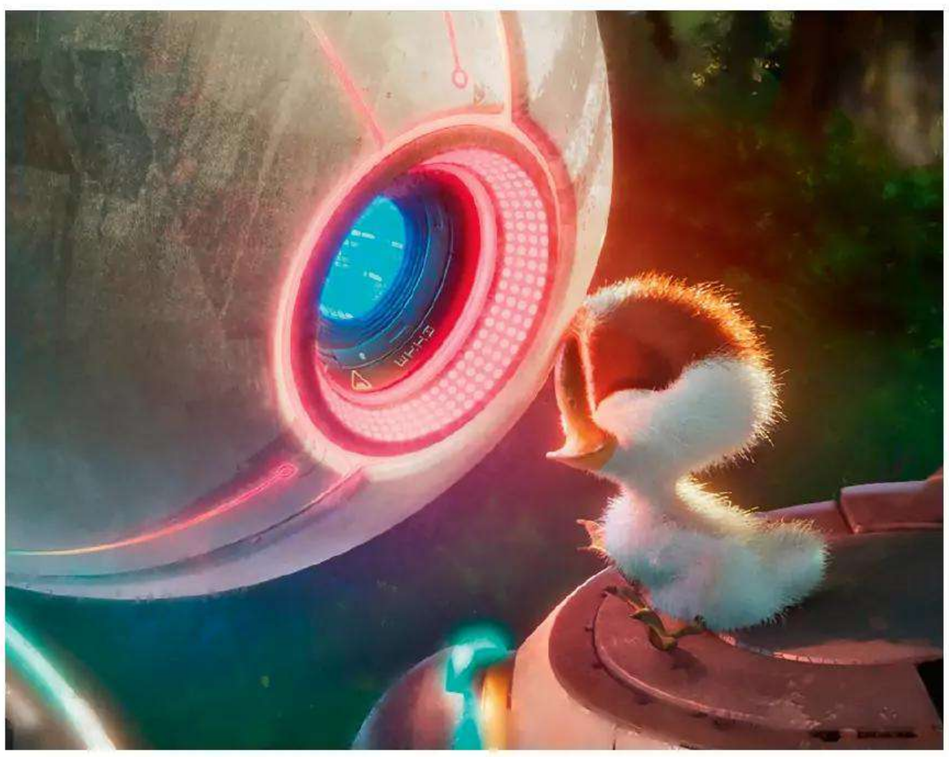
'The one thing I was very insistent on that is different from the robot in the book is that she doesn't have a mouth,' explains Sanders. 'I felt very strongly that we get all of her acting and emotion from her voice and from her eyes and from her body language.' Lupita Nyong'o voices Roz, and due to the real-world push to have artificial voices that are indiscernible from human voices, there was no recourse to robot-voice clichés. 'Because we were restrained in her design, she's more empathetic, more vulnerable, and emotes incredibly well – because of Lupita, and because of the animators as well, primarily,' Sanders asserts.



ART AND SOUL

The Wild Robot's lush, painterly style continues the recent trend of taking big, bold swings with the visuals in CG animation (*Spider-Verse*, *Mutant Mayhem*, et al.). 'It wasn't just to make the film look different,' explains Sanders. 'If it didn't feel like she was really lost in a forest, we wouldn't have the contrast, we wouldn't have the stakes, and we wouldn't feel like she's really on this journey.' Tech advances allow you to 'really feel the artist's hand', adds Margie Cohn, president of DreamWorks Animation. 'It's allowed people to be innovative, and super-ambitious, and to bring a unique style to movies so that you're not confusing one movie with the next,' she says.





ANIMAL MAGIC

The film will also see Roz interacting with a number of the island's animal inhabitants, including gosling Brightbill (Kit Connor) and Fink the fox (Pedro Pascal). The fact that the animals move in a more believable, naturalistic way than you'd expect in an animated film was a boon for Sanders and the crew. 'It's something that [the animators] wouldn't necessarily be guaranteed that they would ever do in their animation careers,' says Sanders.

'Primarily, you're doing animals that are driving cars or using cell phones or wearing ties – that's a thing, and it's appropriate for those stories. But here we had a story where animals could be animals.'

EMOTION CAPTURE

Also evident in the footage *TF* was shown? *The Wild Robot* will be a hankie-decimating tear-jerker, in large part due to the parent-child relationship that develops between Roz and Brightbill. 'I read an article recently that said, "Bring back the tear-jerker", and I was like, "Yes, ahead of the curve!"' laughs Cohn. 'Because it's about life, it's pretty heavy in that way,' adds Sanders. 'But it's also very uplifting and inspiring... This film so mimics life.' **MATT MAYTUM**

THE WILD ROBOT OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 18 OCTOBER.

NEXT BIG THING

MYHA'LA IS CLIMBING THE LADDER...

At a time when it seems that IP rules over the theatrical landscape, Myha'la's blossoming career proves that you can really make a name for yourself working on original projects. She chats to *Teasers* about starring in comedy slasher *Bodies Bodies Bodies*, working with an all-star cast on *Leave the World Behind* and the upcoming third season of *Industry*...

With *Industry* being about investment banking, do you ever see similarities with the entertainment industry in its competitiveness?

Totally. I think the hierarchical nature of it – on a trade floor and on a set – exists, and the sort of generational gaps that happen – old-school people doing the thing and then young people coming in and doing things differently, and times changing and the industry trying to keep up with that. I feel like there are so many similarities.

What was it like working with Julia Roberts and Mahershala Ali on *Leave the World Behind*?

Awesome. They're all so nice and normal. I approached that opportunity as much like a learning experience as I did anything else. I was like, 'If they've managed to do it for this long, there must be some tricks of the trade.' And honest to God, the tricks are show up, do your job and be kind to people.

Was *Bodies Bodies Bodies* a lot of fun to shoot?

It was fun; it was also really hard. Probably the most physically demanding thing I've done. The whole time we were shooting nights and in a simulated hurricane, which was horrendous!

Is there anything you can tease about your character Harper's arc in *Industry* season three?

I don't want to tease anything; I want everyone to be so surprised! I can say that you can expect there to be a next level of tomfoolery. Anything you thought was extreme before is nothing compared to what happens this season.

LAUREN MILES

INDUSTRY S3 AIRS ON BBC1 AND STREAMS ON BBC iPLAYER LATER IN 2024.

NICK THOMPSON/TRUNK ARCHIVE

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James Callis joins the cast as Claude Whelan, while Kristin Scott Thomas returns as Diana Taverner

EXCLUSIVE

I, SPY

SLOW HORSES S4 The scale might be bigger than ever before, but this time it's truly personal...

There are two storylines,' says director Adam Randall (*I See You*) of Season 4 of acclaimed spy-thriller show *Slow Horses*. 'You have a terrorist bomb explosion in a shopping centre, and the murder of an agent. The key question is, how are these things related?'

It's a question that no one's asking bar Jackson Lamb (Gary Oldman), head of the slovenly Slough House that's home to the titular MI5 agents considered 'rejects', 'shitheels' and 'burnouts'. Jackson is the most slovenly of all, drinking, farting and scoffing Jaffa cakes. But he's also the smartest person in the room, one step ahead of his glamorous MI5 counterparts at The Park, led by Diana Taverner (Kristin Scott Thomas).

In S4 one of Jackson's agents, River Cartwright (Jack Lowden), goes rogue to investigate. His leads take him across the English Channel. 'We were shooting a sort of 70s French spy thriller,' smiles Randall. 'We shot it very bleak. It's uncomfortable and hostile.' But hard-won answers await Cartwright, some of them close to home. 'In many ways, this is a season about River,' nods Randall. 'Where he came from, his relationships.'

Season 4 brings back all the familiar faces and adds some important new ones to the mix. Hugo Weaving is 'our key villain', and Ruth Bradley is Emma Flyte, the new 'head dog' of Taverner's internal security. Flyte finds herself going head-to-head with an assassin, and a stunning set-piece in the fifth episode proves that the show does action as well as it does espionage.

'The key to the action sequences were the characters,' says Randall. 'They're less about spectacle, more about feeling every moment. Like, "How can we be in our heroes' shoes? How can we feel their terror?" I wanted the action to feel incredibly grounded and affecting.'

Job done. These slow horses are off to the races. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

SLOW HORSES S4 STREAMS ON APPLE TV+ FROM 4 SEPTEMBER.

Gary Oldman is back as the pungent Jackson Lamb

APPLE TV, CAMERA PRESS / RACHELL SMITH

Q&A

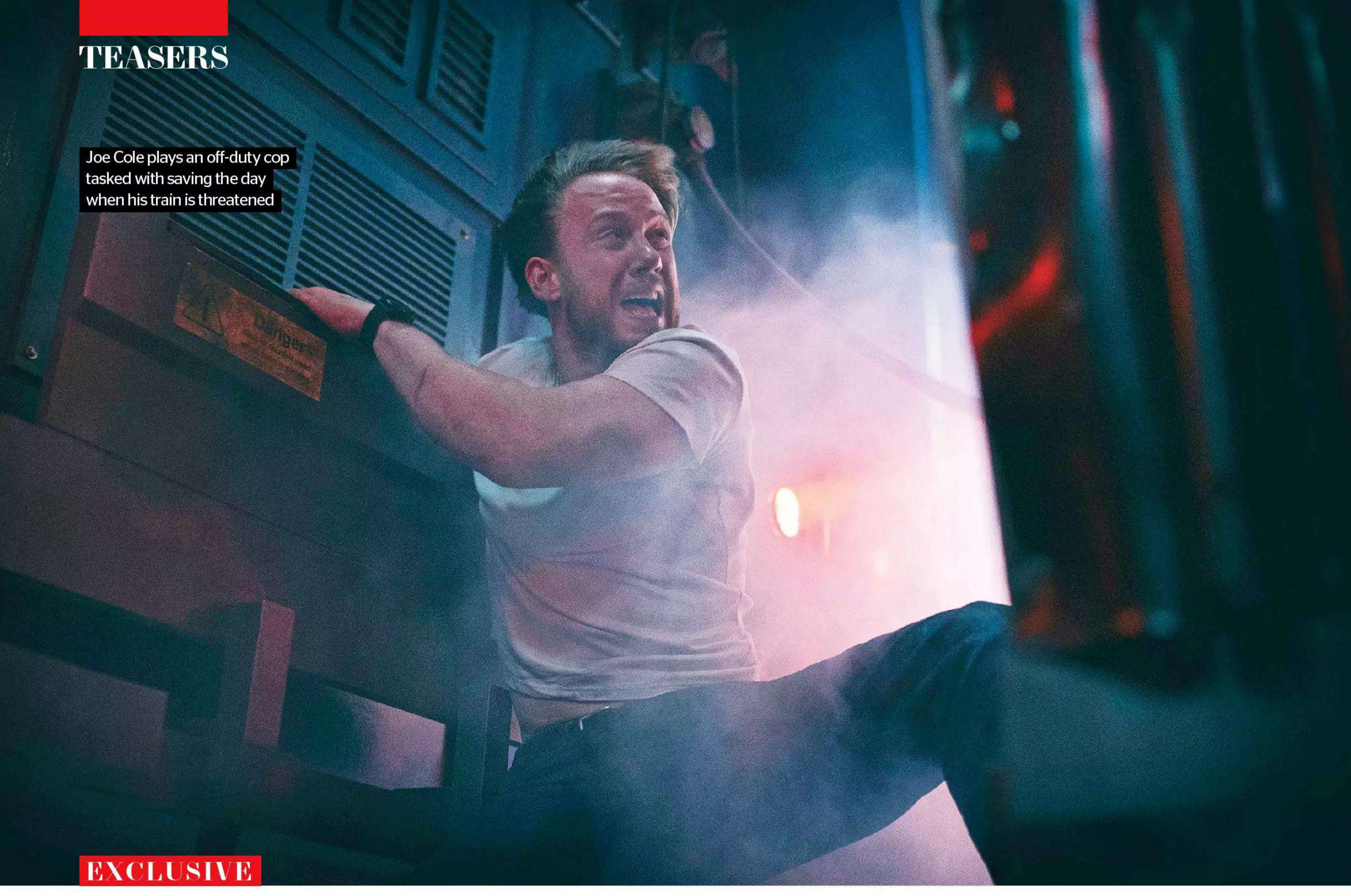
Ruth Bradley

Were you a fan of the show before signing up?
I hadn't seen it! I'd read about it. Then I was sent one scene and it was all coded so I didn't know what it was. I called my agent and said, 'This is some of the best dialogue I've ever read. What is this?' He was like, 'Actually, it's *Slow Horses*...'

Tell us about your character, Emma Flyte...
She's the new head dog for Diana Taverner. She's come from the Met. She's a straight shooter. Head dog is traditionally a man's position, so she's a trailblazer. She starts so confident and excited, like, 'I've finally arrived.' And then she meets Lamb...

Who outwits her, like he does everyone else...
Every time someone meets Jackson Lamb, they're so distracted by his looks, his smell [laughs], his demeanour. It was amazing acting with Gary [Oldman]. I grew up on *Leon*, *The Fifth Element*, *Sid and Nancy*; his Dracula is still one of my favourite performances.

When Emma meets Lamb, he releases a signature fart. Is Oldman so Method he did it on cue, or was it added in post?
Who knows, maybe he did - it was such an open playing field! It's so hilarious, and her response is so hilarious, trying to maintain composure. **JG**



Joe Cole plays an off-duty cop tasked with saving the day when his train is threatened

EXCLUSIVE

OFF THE RAILS

NIGHTSLEEPER Joe Cole must save a hacked train in the BBC's real-time thriller...

Could you hack a train?' That was the question *Nightsleeper* writer and exec producer – and train enthusiast – Nick Leather asked himself when envisioning the series. Described as an exhilarating mixture of *Speed* and the Kiefer Sutherland-led *24*, the six-part BBC show follows an off-duty police officer (Joe Cole) who finds himself suddenly responsible for saving passengers' lives when the sleeper train from Glasgow to London is hacked.

'I had no idea whether this show might happen,' explains Leather, who committed himself to finding out whether the premise was possible before going ahead with it. 'We got a hacking person, a cyber-critical infrastructure person, and a train expert, and put them in the room. After about 40 minutes of them pooling their knowledge they went, "Yeah, we could do this between us; we could hack a train."'

When it came to casting protagonist Joe Roag, Leather knew exactly who he wanted. 'The character's called Joe – that tells you where my head was at! We were looking for that person who was able to be a bit of a hero, but also be able to switch and have a bit of a sensitive side.'

Director Jamie Magnus Stone worked with Cole on set. 'He was so good at bringing this physicality and immediacy to the role,' the director explains. 'As well as giving it a depth and nuance that was, I think, tricky to elicit because the script is real-time and we don't cut away to his home life.' They shot Cole's action-packed scenes in a confined train set built specifically for the production. 'It had these amazing screens,' Leather says. 'Wherever they were in the country was actually whizzing past the window!'

'It's actually a big-budget, six-hour action movie – which I think is pretty rare'
NICK LEATHER

Pamela Nomvete and Alexandra Roach also try to stop the train...

Leather's commitment to realism and meticulous planning also applied when it came to the action scenes. In order to plot out *Nightsleeper*'s action beats, he and Stone acquired a model train set – entirely for work purposes, of course. 'I always relish any excuse to buy toys for any job that I'm on!' Stone exclaims. 'It's great planning, "Well, this person could jump onto the roof here, and if it's moving backwards at this point he's gonna get thrown that way."' They also came in handy during post, with Stone creating 'little temporary placeholder effects with my toy trains. They're a good investment!'

If one thing about *Nightsleeper* is clear, it's that it's no ordinary six-part show. 'It's a British TV series, a BBC series, [but it's] actually a big-budget, six-hour action movie – which I think is a pretty rare thing,' Leather describes, making clear the extent of the series' ambition. 'They're going to do stunts, they're going to do big stuff. You can expect lots of thrills.' **LAUREN MILES**

NIGHTSLEEPER LAUNCHES ON BBC1 THIS SEPTEMBER.

BBC

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THE LL WORD

Contributing editor **LEILA LATIF** has something to say...

THIS MONTH...
IS SOCIAL MEDIA TAKING THE FUN OUT OF MOVIES?

Watched something you liked? Get ready for The Discourse...

David Fincher's *The Social Network* has aged like a fine wine, charting the rise of Mark Zuckerberg and his social media phenomenon Facebook, which changed the world, connected him to billions of people but ultimately ended with him staring blankly at a screen, feeling more alone than ever. For those of us who are film obsessives, social media has allowed us to connect to those who share our passion. Where your family and IRL friends might not be up for counting down to the new *Gladiator II* trailer like it's New Year's Eve, online you can find like-minded people who also want to break it down frame by frame.

But of late the bad seems to be outweighing the good. 'Film Twitter' has diminished more film events for me than enriched them, and 15 minutes of scrolling through TikTok has broadcasted the endings of many of my most anticipated TV shows and films – even if I try to watch them right after release. I'm basically going to have to go off the grid the second *Deadpool & Wolverine* previews, knowing that every single plot point and cameo will instantly flood my feed. Even with access to early press screenings it can't be avoided, and many colleagues who I won't name think nothing of posting the exact details of plot twists and post-credit sequences.

Many publications I work for and adore write spoiler-filled analysis of new releases, and I love nothing more than a good recap, but those are specifically titled to let you know of their contents and to read once you've seen the movie. Meanwhile, on social media, you can go from 'liking' a picture of a friend's cat to accidentally finding out what happens in the third act of the latest Shyamalan, and the widely accepted etiquette of not revealing any plot beyond what's shown in the trailer has gone out the window. In between those posts, my feed is also flooded with influencers desperately looking for viral moments when filling the junket roles that used to go to journalists, asking inane questions of puzzled stars who take their craft seriously. These clips might encourage clicks, but they don't convince people to buy cinema tickets.

While that's all deeply annoying, what truly fills me with dread is the unending discourse. As soon as a buzzy new film, trailer or interview drops, everyone online seems compelled to have an opinion, and that often leads to users treating those who disagree with them as being idiotic or morally bankrupt. Where social media once seemed to be a virtual water cooler where people could gather after an episode of *The Bear* to share their enthusiasm and theorise about where the show could go next, it now seems more like a virtual cesspit. Even though I started watching it the day of release, *The Bear*'s final moments were on my feed by breakfast and by lunch the discourse had moved on to 'this is problematic, actually.' This seems to be at the root of the most common online debates, where protagonists sometimes behaving badly is considered an endorsement of that behaviour. Ironically, if Fincher made *The Social Network* today, our feeds would likely be filled by posts accusing him of bringing on the AI apocalypse by having a tech billionaire at the forefront...

It's not that I need people on social media to agree with one another. And I'll never tire of the Baby Annette memes and rapturous enthusiasm, where a new Kelly Reichardt film premiere is treated like a World Cup final. But more often than not, I find myself staring at the screen with grim detachment like Jesse Eisenberg did in *The Social Network*. This was supposed to bring us closer together, and instead it's taking the fun out of the movies.

LEILA WILL BE BACK NEXT ISSUE. FOR FURTHER MUSINGS AND MISSIVES FOLLOW @LEILA_LATIF ON X/TWITTER.

GETTY

EXCLUSIVE

PARTNERS IN CRIME

THE PENGUIN HBO's huge *The Batman* spin-off brings a complex crime drama to our TV screens.

Picking up a week after the Riddler flooded Gotham City in 2022 movie *The Batman*, eight-part HBO show *The Penguin* finds a city suffering. 'Rife with conflict,' is how executive producer Dylan Clark, who also produced the Matt Reeves movie, puts it, pointing out that there's a 'power vacuum' following the death of crime lord Carmine Falcone (John Turturro).

'Gangs in Gotham are going to try to seize opportunities,' Clark tells *Teasers*. 'But you have this crafty, manipulative, conniving, charming character, Oz Cobb, waiting in the wings. Watching Oz's rise is like a *Scarface* story. He's known as The Kingpin in the comics.'

As played by an unrecognisable Colin Farrell, who again inhabits the role (and the prosthetics) in the show, Oswald Cobblepot radiated a dark charisma that reached far beyond the six scenes he (dis)graced in *The Batman*. Now he has eight hours to play with. No wonder showrunner Lauren LeFranc (*Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*) promises a 'character study' that 'digs deeper into psychology'. *The Penguin* is, she says, a crime drama. 'Gotham is not a real city in the United States, but it feels like one, and Oz is a man – he's a very different depiction to previous versions of the Penguin. He's just a mobster. That was enticing.'

For inspiration, LeFranc looked to Buddy Cianci, who was the mayor of Providence, Rhode Island for 21 years. A charming and affable man prone to violence, Cianci worked with the New England Mob and was twice jailed. An equally crucial influence on *The Penguin* are classic crime movies. Clark namechecks *Manhunter* and *Zodiac*, while Reeves, who executive produces, says, '*The Long Good Friday* was one of the references for Oz. And *Scarface*.' It's the extension of an idea that Reeves brought to his movie: '*The Batman* was a serial-killer noir,' he explains. 'I wanted *The Batman* to be like an old Warner Bros. gangster movie. You can go down one alley and meet Sydney Greenstreet.'

As for LeFranc, she felt it was crucial to put her spin on the genre. 'Very few women have been able to write these kinds of movies or television shows,' she says. 'I think my perspective on Oz, and masculinity in general, is different. And that made me also want to surround him with really interesting, complicated women [Cristin Milioti plays Carmine's daughter Sofia, aka Hangman, making her own play for power when she's released from Arkham Asylum]. In traditional crime dramas, rarely are the women as interesting as the men. So I took this as an opportunity to see what had been done before me, to respect and honour the genre, and then to also evolve it.'

How's that for criminal enterprise?

JAMIE GRAHAM

THE PENGUIN WILL AIR ON SKY ATLANTIC AND NOW IN SEPTEMBER.

'When you feel a little p-peckish, p-p-pick up a dirty martini...'

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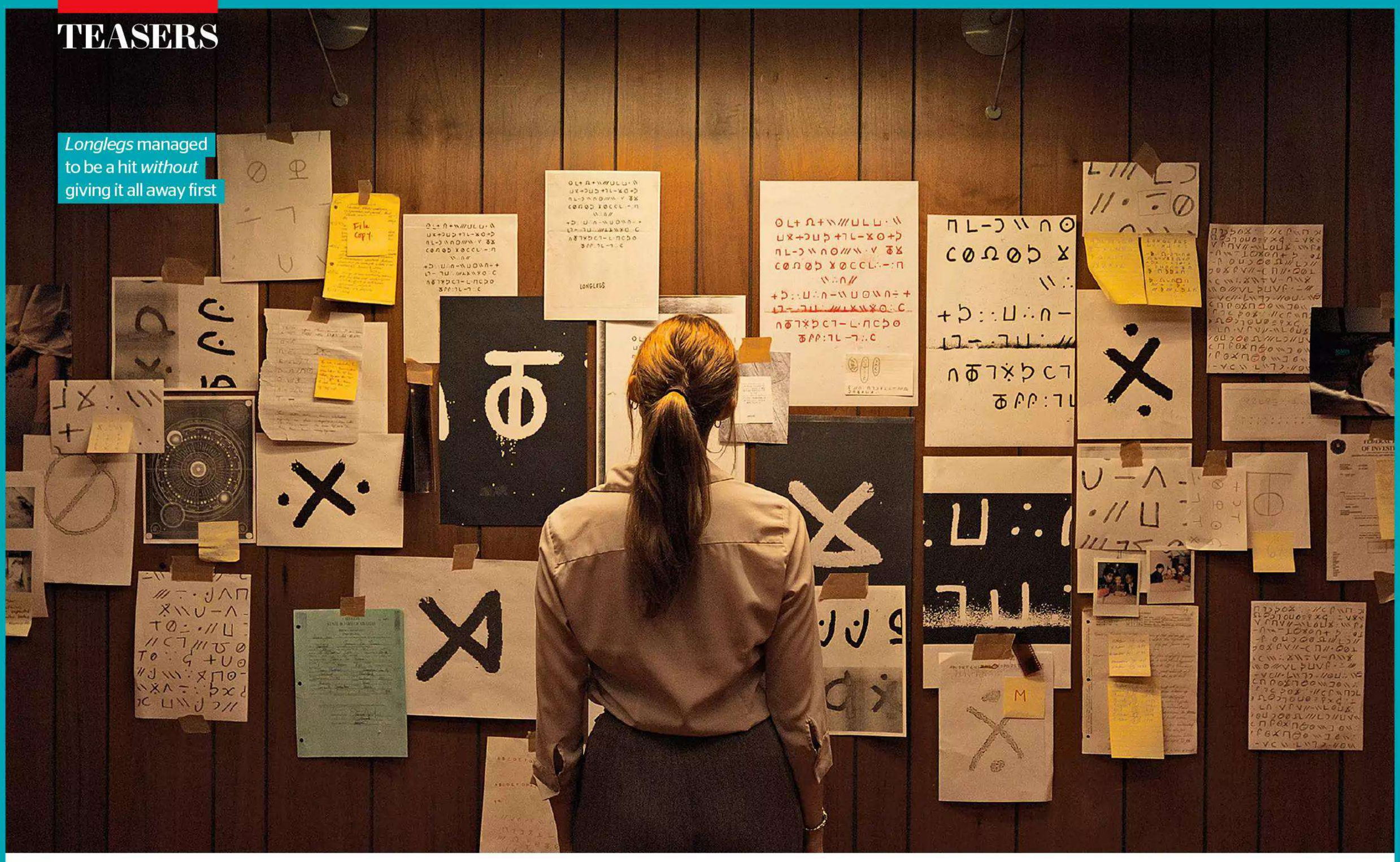
HBO/MAGALI BOTAY

‘Flippin’ heck!’ is the usual reaction when people learn it’s Colin Farrell playing the Penguin

Longlegs managed to be a hit *without* giving it all away first



CAN WE TALK ABOUT?

THE NEED TO CUT BACK ON SPOILERIFIC TRAILERS...

JAMIE GRAHAM
@JAMIE_GRAHAM9

Giving away too much in trailers is nothing new – the *Highlander* promo (1986) showed climactic footage of Connor MacLeod and the Kurgan crossing swords in front of the Silvercup sign, while *Friday the 13th*'s (1980) counted out each of the film's deaths.

But for the most part, trailers used to communicate plot and mood – and showcase thrilling visuals – without letting the cat entirely out of the bag. Take the trailer for *Alien* (1979), which not only kept ginger kitty Jonesy largely under wraps but also everything else, even eschewing dialogue and voiceover (voice actor Don LaFontaine dominated the era, lending his stentorian larynx to more than 5,000 trailers) in favour of atmosphere-drenched images and dissonant sound design.

These days, marketing bods consider anything and everything fair game. In the time of the titles cited above, we got one trailer played exclusively in cinemas. Now we get several trailers which are repeatedly viewed and analysed online – a migration first made in the summer of 1993. Hell, since the mid 2010s, we even get trailers to the trailers (bumpers) – a fast-cut explosion of images designed to capture anyone scrolling through social media. Watch everything on offer and you no longer need to see the film. Yes, we're talking about you, *Terminator Salvation*. And you, *Abigail*, for giving away the twist. And you, *Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F*, for showing the final scene of the movie. And you, and you, and you...

> 'WATCH EVERYTHING ON OFFER AND YOU NO LONGER NEED TO SEE THE FILM'

All of which makes it a delight that indie horror movie *Longlegs* enjoyed a record-breaking opening weekend of $22.6m in the States. Here's a movie that ignored the modern maxim of more is more, instead relying on cryptic trailers that kept its titular villain, played by Nicolas Cage, hidden, and built intrigue with one of the most ingenious viral campaigns since *The Blair Witch Project*.

Trailers aren't going anywhere. They've been with us since 1913, and such auteurs as Hitchcock and Kubrick even made their own. But if a small horror movie can opt to keep Cage caged and be a smash hit, isn't that proof that trailers can do their job without ruining the movies they're promoting?

Don LaFontaine recording one of his many, many voiceovers

ALAMY, NEON

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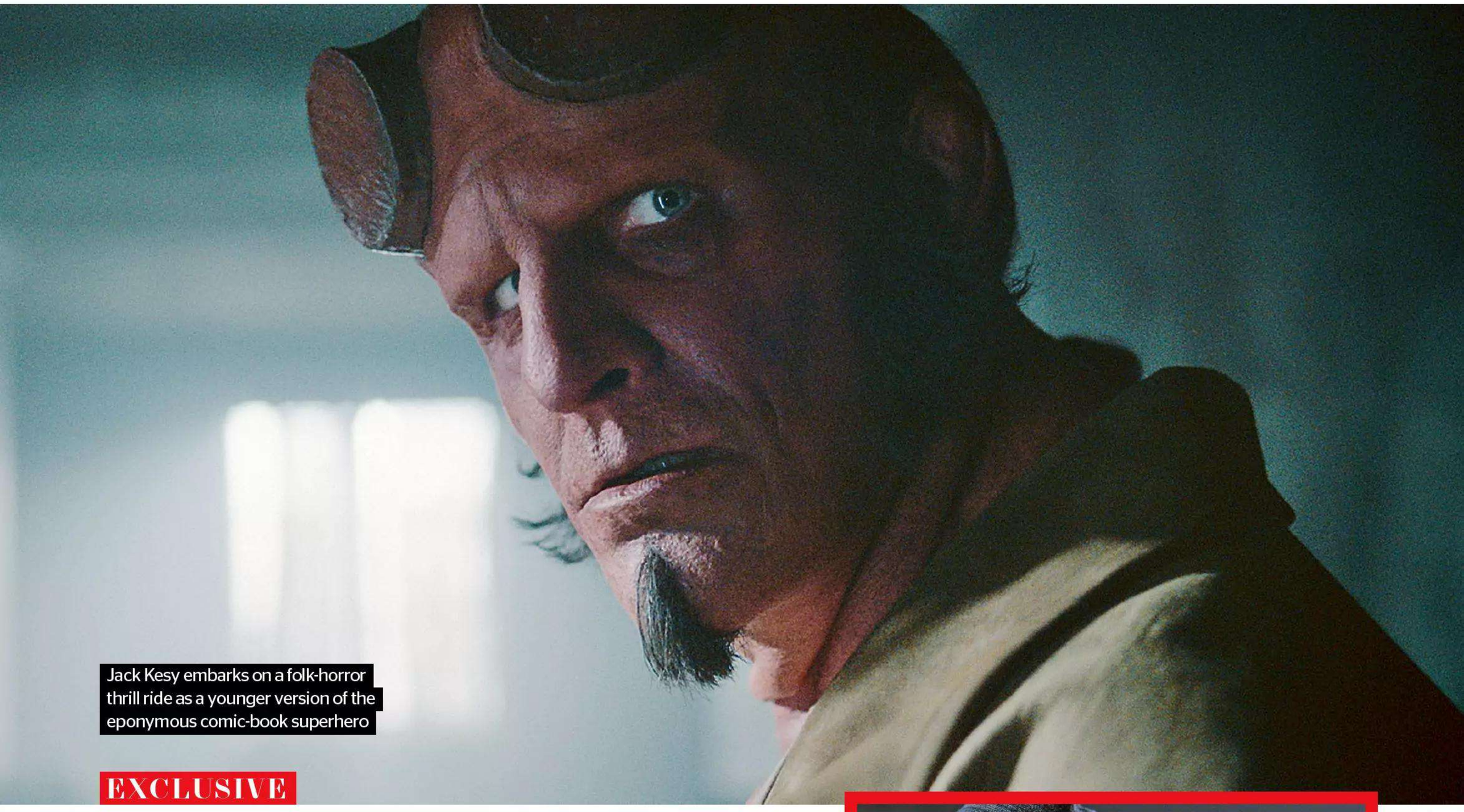


Jack Kesy embarks on a folk-horror thrill ride as a younger version of the eponymous comic-book superhero

EXCLUSIVE

BETTER THE DEVIL

HELLBOY: THE CROOKED MAN Big Red goes back to the 1950s and to his source.

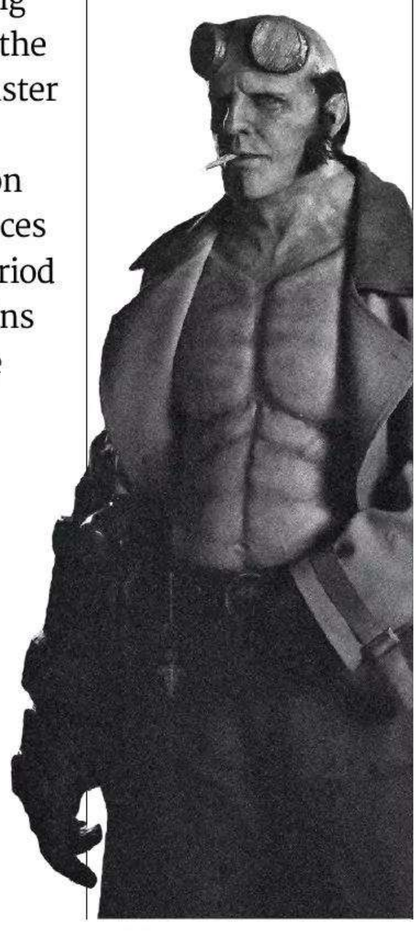
I don't think in terms of, "It's a reboot" or trying to start a new franchise – this isn't content, it's a movie that needs to stand on its own,' says director Brian Taylor, Zooming with *Teasers* from his study rammed with retro film posters and books. 'Nobody wants to see a cheap knock-off of a Guillermo del Toro $100-million movie.'

Director Brian Taylor on set with actor Martin Bassindale
Below: Hellboy

As helmer and co-writer on the fourth instalment of the Hellboy universe – after Guillermo del Toro's 2004 and 2008 adaps of the Dark Horse Comics character, and Neil Marshall's redo in 2019 – Taylor is all about returning to the source. For the first time in all his on-screen iterations, *Hellboy*'s creator Mike Mignola has written the script (alongside Christopher Golden and Taylor), adapting directly from his 2008 *Crooked Man* series, which sees the demon (Jack Kesy) team up with a rookie B.P.R.D. (Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense) agent in 50s Appalachia to investigate a coven and the title big baddie (Martin Bassindale).

'As cool as those other movies were, even Mignola will tell you it's not quite his character,' says Taylor, who leaned in hard to the period setting and the folk-horror vibe inherent in the comic books. 'This is going back to the young Hellboy where he was really more of the plumber who's going to fix your monster problem. This wandering, sarcastic, soulful, smoking guy who stumbles on supernatural hauntings and occurrences and helps out as best he can.' The period helps simplify the premise, he explains – no cellphones, no internet, 'a more contained, grounded folk-horror version of *Hellboy* rather than a large-scale sort of space opera.'

'I wanted the witch balls and all the quirky stuff from the original that makes the comic book so much fun and so singular. We're so oversaturated with technology and information… What if you were just in a very simple place with some very strange ideas and you just had to deal with it?'



That lo-fi ethos extends to the SFX work too, with practical effects chosen over CGI. Hellboy's hand is an animatronic glove, and creepy moments like a witch crawling back into her skin were achieved with a prosthetic and lube.

'I'd rather watch what Cronenberg or Clive Barker were doing than something I know was just a guy sitting on a computer,' Taylor grins. 'I want to feel like I can reach out and touch it.'

The aim isn't to establish a franchise – though Taylor is open to revisiting *Hellboy* in the 60s, 70s and 80s – it's to ensure the right hand of doom is done right. 'If Mike feels like for the first time he sees his guy on screen, then I feel like we've succeeded.'

JANE CROWTHER

HELLBOY: THE CROOKED MAN
OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 27 SEPTEMBER.

YANA BLAJEVA, ICON FILM DISTRIBUTION, MILLENNIUM MEDIA, SAM SCHULTE

Material for the script was sourced from newspaper reports on the trial

EXCLUSIVE

MURDER BY NUMBERS

THE GOLDMAN CASE Cédric Kahn's absorbing drama puts anti-Semitism in the dock.

In a year of splendid French courtroom dramas like *Anatomy of a Fall*, Cédric Kahn's *The Goldman Case* is another to join the ranks. In 1976, French activist, left-wing intellectual and criminal Pierre Goldman (Arieh Worthalter) stood trial for two murders he didn't commit. As the trial gets underway, he blatantly admits to armed robbery charges, much to the exasperation of his attorney Georges Kiejman (Arthur Harari, the Oscar-winning co-writer of *Anatomy*...).

Kahn (2018's *The Prayer*) first discovered Goldman through reading his book *Dim Memories of a Polish Jew Born in France*. 'It was both an autobiography and a creed,' says Kahn, when *Teasers* meets him in Paris. 'And so it was interesting to have his take on the way he defended. He told his story and defended the case, but also he told the story of his parents, his family. And I was fascinated by the character and by his speech, by his mastery of speech.'

Raised by ardent Jewish communists, Goldman's colourful life makes for a fascinating backdrop, but the film is primarily centred in the courtroom, never leaving its confines. Kahn saw it like a sports match. 'I wanted it to be a re-enactment of the actual trial, but really a dialectic sports game... for this confrontation. And that's what I expected from the actors, not to be settled in their positions, but really to play hard and quick.'

Rather than using Goldman's book, Kahn and his co-writer Nathalie Hertzberg preferred to source material on the trial from newspaper reportage at the time. Where the film becomes truly dramatic is as Kiejman cross-examines witnesses – disproving many who claimed to have seen Goldman commit the murders.

'I was fascinated by the character and by his mastery of speech'
CÉDRIC KAHN

Arieh Worthalter plays real-life criminal Pierre Goldman

Key to the case is Goldman's Jewish religion, which makes him a target for anti-Semitic witnesses. As Khan notes, Goldman said, '"I'm being accused because I'm Jewish, because all the witnesses are anti-Semites, and so they're not judging me as a criminal, but as a Jew." And we don't know the level of honesty of this analysis. Was it just strategy, or did he really feel that?'

However tense the drama remains, Kahn seems delighted by those he got to work with. 'Sometimes [as] the director, you really feel that you have to carry the others through the shoot. And here I felt carried away. What I remember, really, is the first time that I went in this full room, and there were 120 people there. And I remember that moment I was really nervous. It was very special.' He chuckles. 'But what you really know as a director... it's not because you enjoy the shoot that the film is going to be good!' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE GOLDMAN CASE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 20 SEPTEMBER.

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THE HERO

Henry Selick has played a defining role in bringing stop-motion animation into the Hollywood mainstream. His first feature – *The Nightmare Before Christmas* – has been a cornerstone of popular culture for three decades; the equally adored *Coraline* is back in cinemas for its 15th anniversary. Now, Selick tells *Teasers* about having his work displayed in the BFI's upcoming stop-motion season…

HENRY SELICK

THE *CORALINE* DIRECTOR REFLECTS ON AN IMPRESSIVE CAREER FUELLED BY HIS PASSION FOR STOP-MOTION ANIMATION.

***The Nightmare Before Christmas* has had such an impact on pop culture. That must be an amazing feeling…**

It's pretty great, because when we made the film, it was – for its time, for a Disney animated film – on the low-budget side. It came, it was a modest success, and it went. And then over the years it just started to take off. We celebrate Halloween in a big way here in the US, and when kids started showing up with handmade outfits for *Nightmare* it was wonderful. Travelling recently I saw a little boy at the airport dragging around a Jack Skellington doll. It's really nice to be part of something that takes on a life of its own.

***Monkeybone* is an unconventional film for you as it features live-action elements. Was that quite out of your comfort zone?**

There's a lot about that that was out of my comfort zone. It's an example of a couple of things – one was when you're on a project there's going to be those times when, to keep it going, you have to make a decision, and sometimes it's not worth it. I've very mixed feelings about the film, but I'd love to do a director's cut because there's all this great animation that was cut out of the film. It was taken over. One of the main things that I wasn't used to was how much power actors have. Let's just say me and Brendan Fraser, we didn't really get along because he felt I knew how to direct puppets, but not people. But I am friends with him now!

How did you come to make *Coraline*, Laika's first feature?

I'd met [author] Neil Gaiman, who shared his pages with me of *Coraline*. I shared those with [producer] Bill Mechanic and he loved it. I convinced him I wanted to write the script. Laika liked my script, and [owner] Phil Knight said, 'If you can find a distributor for the film, I'll back it.' I did find a distributor; everyone was shocked! And it's proving to be a lot like *Nightmare*. It's seeing this huge resurgence. It's the second film I've made that has a long, long life and I'm very happy with it.

From an outside perspective, it seems that stop-motion projects are often harder to get made than the average film. Would you say that's right?

Yeah. After *Nightmare Before Christmas* was a hit we got another one going, but in the midst of *James and the Giant Peach*, *Toy Story* comes out. The head of production at Disney told me, 'We don't think this stop-motion is a viable way of making animated films.' CG became the only way to go in the US. But [stop-motion] will never disappear; there'll always be people who love doing it and, when done well, fans to see it.

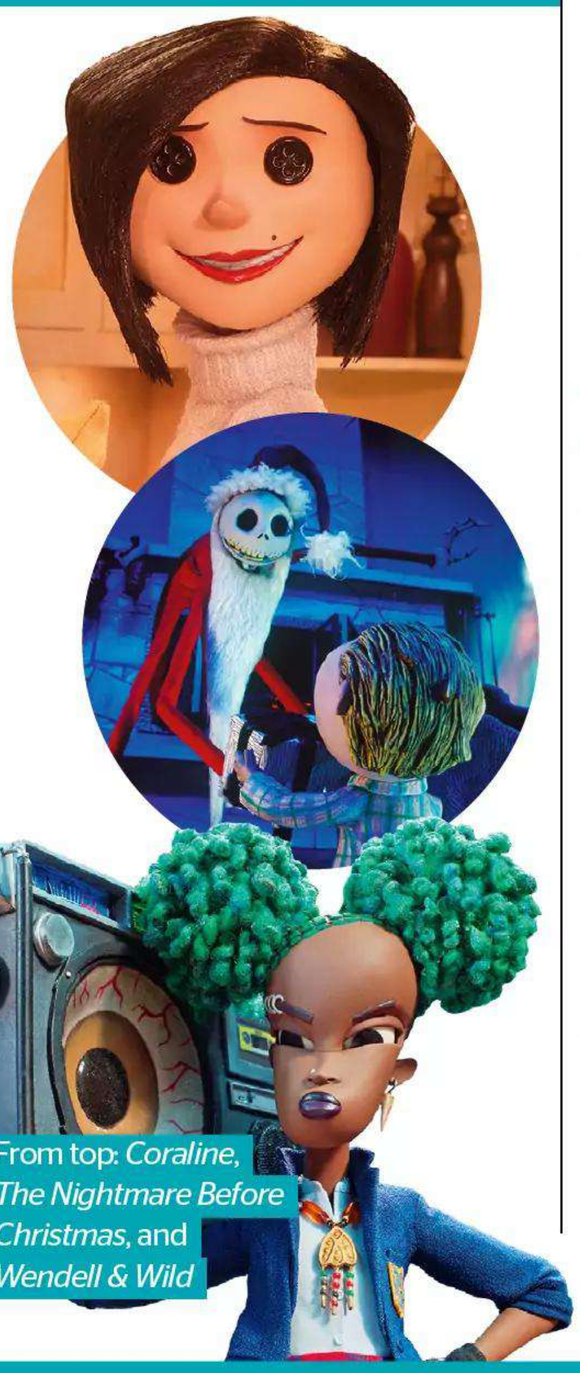
What inspired the story of 2022's *Wendell & Wild*?

It was something I'd written as a short story years earlier. I was basically inspired by my sons when they were little. I did a drawing of them with horns, and I grew up with a friend – and I still know him – named Wendell Wild. He's very pleased some demons were named after him!

How does it feel to have your work displayed at the BFI as part of its stop-motion season?

It's incredible. It's a prestigious organisation, and there are so many incredible stop-motion films that have been made. It may never be the most popular form of animation, but we have our fans and it's incredible to be honoured in this way. **LAUREN MILES**

STOP MOTION: CELEBRATING HAND-CRAFTED ANIMATION ON THE BIG SCREEN RUNS UNTIL 9 OCTOBER AT BFI SOUTHBANK. THE LAIKA: FRAME X FRAME EXHIBITION IS OPEN AT THE SAME VENUE UNTIL 1 OCTOBER.



From top: *Coraline*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and *Wendell & Wild*

LAIKA, NETFLIX, TOUCHSTONE PICTURES

'IT'S REALLY NICE TO BE PART OF SOMETHING THAT TAKES ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN'

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SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR

Say his name three times and he reappears... *Total Film* ventures onto the wonky, chequerboard-floored set of *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* – a direct sequel to Tim Burton's 80s classic – and discovers why now's the time to shake the juice loose...

WORDS JANE CROWTHER

Michael Keaton reprises his role as 'ghost with the most' Beetlejuice

21 JUNE 2023, LEAVESDEN STUDIOS

There's a lot of waiting around on film sets. Waiting for action, waiting for playback, waiting in line for lunch… but today *Total Film* is enjoying a little lingering. We're standing on a sloping monochrome floor next to a mottled grey sofa in a room with pockmarked metallic walls. We've entered via a turnstile door and shuffled our way past yellowing, plastic corrugated sheets and a tilted coffee table towards a service window where a ticker-tape dispenser runs into eight digits. The art on the walls can only be described as queasy. All we need is a shrunken head explorer and a bisected magician's assistant to complete the scene…

Code-named 'Blue Hawaii' for secrecy, this is one of numerous recreations of sets from 1988's cult favourite, *Beetlejuice*, in a sprawling production that spills across five sound stages on the Warner Bros. backlot during an eight-week UK shoot. The famous waiting room in the afterlife, this set will be coming back to haunt audiences, along with the Deetz house – brought back to life in Leavesden and in East Corinth, Vermont. In case you haven't access to the *Handbook for the Recently Deceased*, a quick primer on Tim Burton's trippy, anarchic horror-comedy, which made Winona Ryder an emo poster-girl of the 80s and beyond. Beetlejuice of the title is a sweary, pervy malevolence incanted from his eternal unrest by saying his name thrice; an act committed by newly dead couple Adam and Barbara Maitland (Alec Baldwin and Geena Davis) when their New England house is inhabited by a ghastly New York art couple, the Deetz', and their teen daughter, Lydia (a then 15-year-old Ryder). Lydia can see dead people, Beetlejuice (Michael Keaton) can cause havoc, and dark comedy chaos ensues as the spirits try to scare the living away. A deliberately low-fi concoction tapping into director Tim Burton's love of B-movies, the film firmly established the auteur's MO within the industry, cemented a working relationship over numerous films with both Keaton and Ryder, and broke the mould to craft an 80s classic that seemed to resist all attempts to replicate it (though a surf-inspired sequel was apparently toyed with in 1990). Until now…

> 'IF YOU WANT TO DO A SEQUEL TO MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE OR EVEN BATMAN, YOU GO, "WELL, WE KNOW WHAT IT IS." THIS IS NOTHING LIKE THAT'
>
> MICHAEL KEATON

TF is tiptoeing through the Deetz' attic (complete with the recognisable tiny model village being captured by a snorkel lens), onto an afterlife train station, followed by an immigration hall and dry cleaners before we find ourselves in a white clapboard chapel where a major plot

PARISA TAGHIZADEH/WARNER BROS

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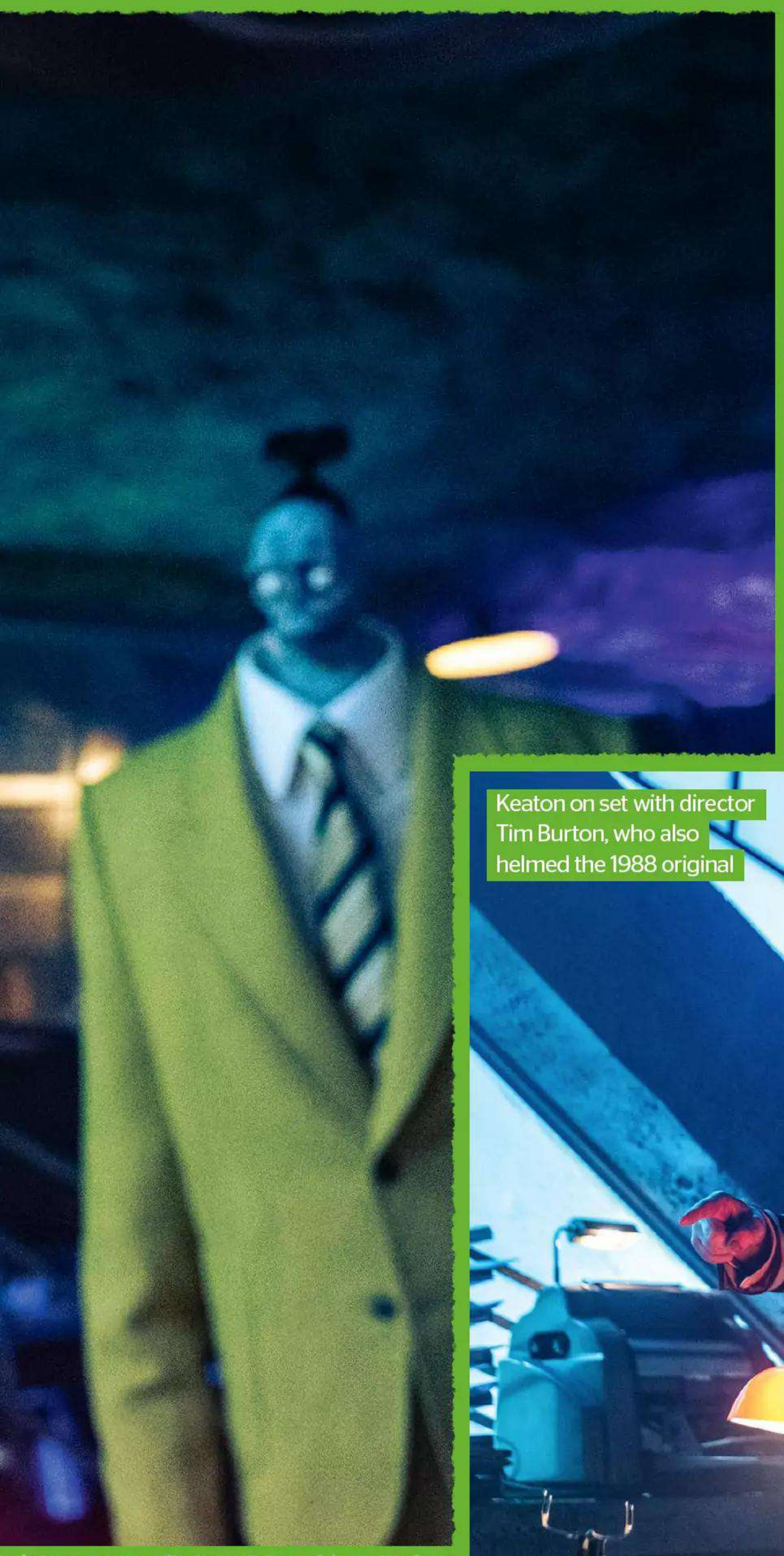


Keaton first played the iconic role more than 30 years ago

Keaton on set with director Tim Burton, who also helmed the 1988 original

twist to the movie is being filmed. The spoiler police prevent us from reporting what happens in the scene, but Burton, in black beret, is directing Keaton (resplendent in Beetlejuice-livid green hair) and Ryder (sporting Lydia's trademark fringe) along with other cast members. Getting ready for a take, Keaton pops his grimy fake teeth in and delivers his reaction shot to the entrance of a key character. It's as 'big' as one would expect from the 'ghost with the most' and the actor cracks himself up after 'Cut!' is called. 'The cheapest move,' he chuckles to Ryder as they wait to go again.

So how did we get to here? Though we can't divulge the plot points that put Keaton all agog at the altar, narratively *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* follows a similar sell to recent revisits *Top Gun: Maverick*, *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* and *Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F* in that it capitalises on the time that has passed since the original release and explores where we find the characters decades later (producer Tommy Harper has form with this approach, with both *The Force Awakens* and *Maverick*). In the time since her haunting as a teen, widowed Lydia has made a career as a TV medium on her show, *Ghost House with Lydia Deetz*, a vocation that her cynical 16-year-old daughter

Willem Dafoe stars as leader of the Afterlife Crimes Unit, Wolf Jackson

TEEN QUEEN

WEDNESDAY STAR JENNA ORTEGA CHATS STRANGE AND UNUSUAL GIRLS

What was it about Astrid that you connected with?
I loved that she was a geek, of course. She's just a really insightful, confused girl who has an awkward relationship with her mom, which is insane – to act like you hate Lydia Deetz. I always saw that as a challenge as well, because she's so cool. Lydia and Astrid are very different but they're the smartest ones in the room.

What was it like working with Winona?
Winona and I just started talking and we couldn't stop. On day one, I feel like she opened and extended her arms towards me, and for that I'm immensely grateful, because it made the shooting experience that much more comfortable. We became in sync really suddenly, which was really beneficial for a fever dream-esque film where you're jumping from plot to plot, to idea to skit to prank.

What advice did she give you about handling fame?
I don't know that she outright gave any advice, but she told me about her experience, and what it was like for her coming up – it hadn't even been a year since *Wednesday* had come out, and it was at the height of the craziness. It's very unsettling, that kind of attention when it's that quick and unexpected. It was just nice to have that connection, because it's hard to find people who can relate to that experience.

If you could bring someone back from the dead by saying their name three times, who would it be?
My grandpa who I never met. Or Prince! **JC**

Winona Ryder as Lydia Deetz with Jenna Ortega as her teenage daughter, Astrid

Beetlejuice returns to the fray when Astrid opens a mysterious portal to the afterlife

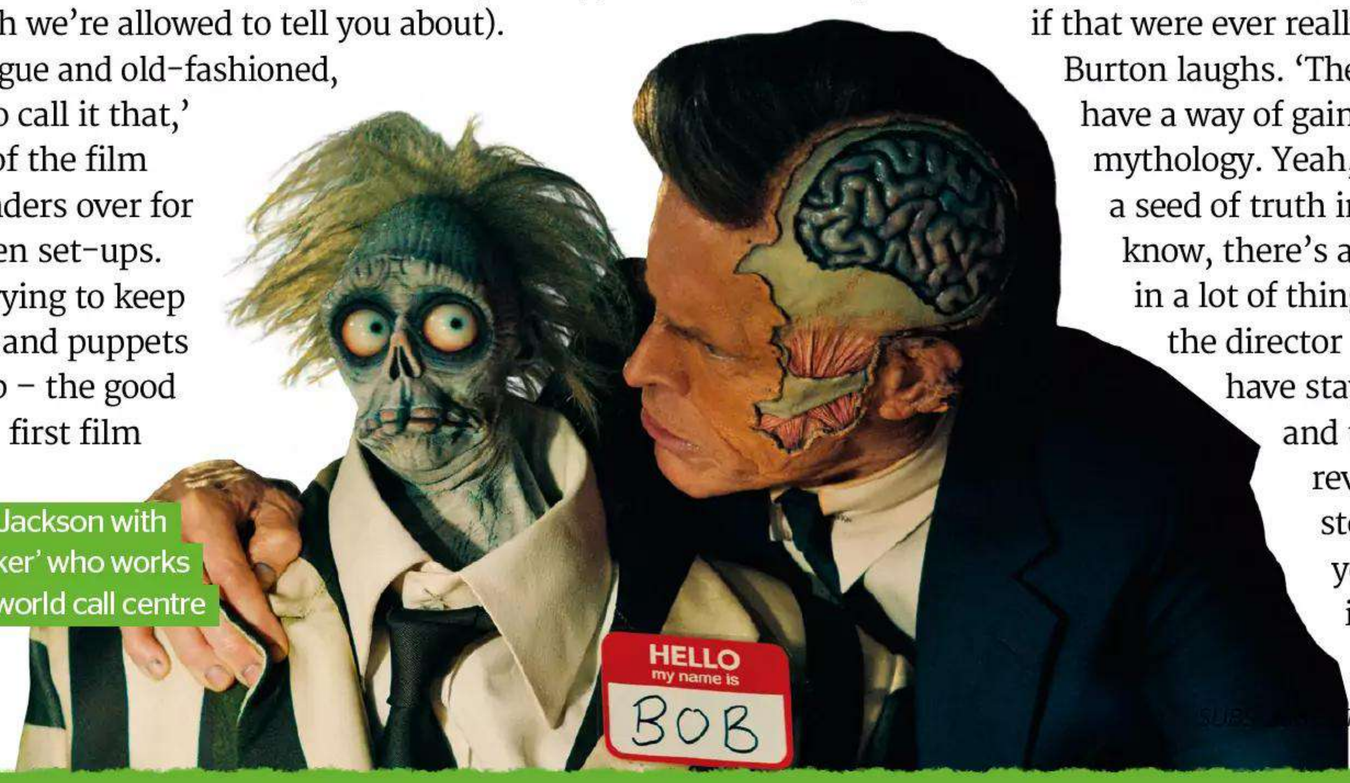
Astrid (*Wednesday* star Jenna Ortega) loathes – even more so since it's brought ponytailed Rory Kincaid (Justin Theroux) into their lives as Lydia's manager and fiancé.

Emotionally estranged from each other, mother and daughter are forced to reevaluate their relationship when a family tragedy brings them back to Winter River, Connecticut. There, three generations of Deetz women (including returning Catherine O'Hara as artist matriarch Delia) are forced to deal with Beetlejuice again when Astrid accidentally opens a portal to the afterlife. Also in the mix are Monica Bellucci's Delores, a mysterious corpse bride figure trying to track Beetlejuice down, and Willem Dafoe's Wolf Jackson, the former star of a 70s cop movie series, *Hardballer*, who died on set during a stunt and now heads up the Afterlife Crimes Unit.

'When they said that they were making another one – you're always a little cautious, because you're wondering what the intentions are: is it a money-grab, or is it a good idea?' Dafoe muses, having wanted to work with Burton for years and nearly being in the Batman franchise. 'But then I read the script, and Tim talked to me about the idea and it all fell into place. I was very excited to finally work with him.'

Oh, and let's not forget 'Bob', a shrunken head fella who, along with his fellow 'shrinkers', works for Beetlejuice in a Neitherworld call centre – they wear gold blazers that costume designer Colleen Atwood based on Century 21 Real Estate uniforms. Danny Elfman is scoring and FX whiz Neal Scanlan is providing a treasure trove of slimy, flappy, quirky, funny physical effects that we prod and play with in his on-set creature workshop (sadly, none of which we're allowed to tell you about).

'It's analogue and old-fashioned, if you want to call it that,' says Burton of the film when he wanders over for a chat between set-ups. 'We're just trying to keep it no-digital, and puppets and make-up – the good old days. The first film was just what it was, I didn't ever try to analyse it, I was surprised with whatever success it had. For me, it's analogue going back to something more personal and fun. So that's what we're trying to do here with the spirit and the character of it. That funhouse quality…'



Dafoe as Wolf Jackson with 'Bob' – a 'shrinker' who works at the Neitherworld call centre

IT'S SHOWTIME!

Burton doubles down on his claim that the success of the first *Beetlejuice* wasn't a plan or an expectation when we catch up with him in the final mix, tinkering with a couple of colour timing issues in summer 2024. He's ensconced in Ireland shooting season two of *Wednesday*, his dog Levi snoozing in the corner of an office crammed with props from his previous movies. Dominating the room is a huge movie poster of Elvis Presley's *Blue Hawaii* – the inspiration for that aforementioned surfing sequel, if that were ever really a thing? Burton laughs. 'These things have a way of gaining a certain mythology. Yeah, there was a seed of truth in it, but, you know, there's a seed of truth in a lot of things.' Though the director and his cast have stayed in touch and talked about revisiting the story over the years ('Winona is the one

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Ortega and Burton on set

that probably brought it up the most, in her own way, every few years'), they had never seriously considered adding to the legacy, he says. 'We were not out to make a sequel. This was before franchises were talked about. The first time I ever heard that word, by the way, was on *Batman Returns*. I remember first hearing it and I just got a cold chill down my spine. It wasn't until lately that I started thinking about how after all this time there was something emotional that made me want to do it. There was something about the Lydia character, and what happens to people 35 years later. That was the emotional hook to me.'

He admits that he'd become a little jaded with movies until making a TV show re-energised him. 'I went off to Romania for nine months [shooting *Wednesday*], and had time to wander the Carpathian Mountains and think about things. *Wednesday* reconnected me to why I like making things. It was like shooting a movie on a TV schedule. It was quick. It was invigorating.' The passing of time and life experiences had also made him think differently: 'What happens to people, once you get older? You go through different things. You have kids. It changes you. Now, I understand this stuff a bit better. I've been through it myself.'

Collaborating with *Wednesday* creators Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, Burton had a script written and got in touch with his OG cast. Keaton, no stranger to revisiting a Burton creation, having recently re-donned the Batman cowl for *The Flash*, recalls a creative pact of sorts between himself and his director as he Zooms from the back porch of his Montana farm. 'It took so long because Tim and I said, "We'll only do this if we really feel like we can do it again." If you want to do a sequel to *Mission: Impossible* or even *Batman* you go, "Well, we know what it is." This is nothing like that.'

'I THINK WE ALL KNEW THE ONLY WAY IT COULD WORK WAS IF TIM WAS DIRECTING'

WINONA RYDER

But in order to get the gang back together, there were certain dealbreakers. For Keaton, it had to not rely on CGI or up his screen time as Beetlejuice. 'It'd be a huge mistake if I was in any more, time-wise, than I was in the beginning,' he says. 'That mistake is always made in sequels.' For Ryder, Burton was non-negotiable. 'I think we all knew the only way that it could work was if Tim was directing,' she says. And when it became clear that Burton was on-board along with Keaton and O'Hara, she was 'struck with terror'. 'I've never returned to a role.

BACK TO BLACK

JUSTIN THEROUX LEANS INTO HIS EMO YOUTH

What was your relationship to the original film?
For those of us that had little emo upbringings it was the first time I felt I saw some of my feelings represented on film. Michael Keaton was an undeniably charismatic actor, and it was the first time I'd really seen that in a part. I was not an actor yet but I remember being like, 'Oh, that's something special.' So all these years later, when it comes around and I get to be in it, it's absolutely one of those 'pinch yourself' moments.

Any hesitation in taking it on?
Finding out that it was all the same players put ice on any anxiety I may have had. And then I read the script and it was so good. It's certainly bigger than the last film, but it still has that very independent film feel. It takes departures that only an auteur director like Tim is allowed to take.

What was it like working with Michael and Winona?
The first time I met Michael he was in the full Beetlejuice costume and make-up and I thought, 'What a great way to meet him.' He's so wonderful, very specific and high-energy. Winona is also wonderful and looks like she hasn't aged a day since the first film. Sometimes you just get to walk into a movie that you love – someone gave me permission to come play in that playground.

If you could bring someone back from the dead by saying their name three times, who would it be?
Every dog that I've ever loved. **JC**

Justin Theroux plays Lydia's manager and fiancé

I've done a series, but that's very different. I was 15 when I made it [she is now 52], so it's a lifetime. There is an element of terror that I think we all had. And then once we started it, you know, you find your rhythm.'

FAMILY VALUES

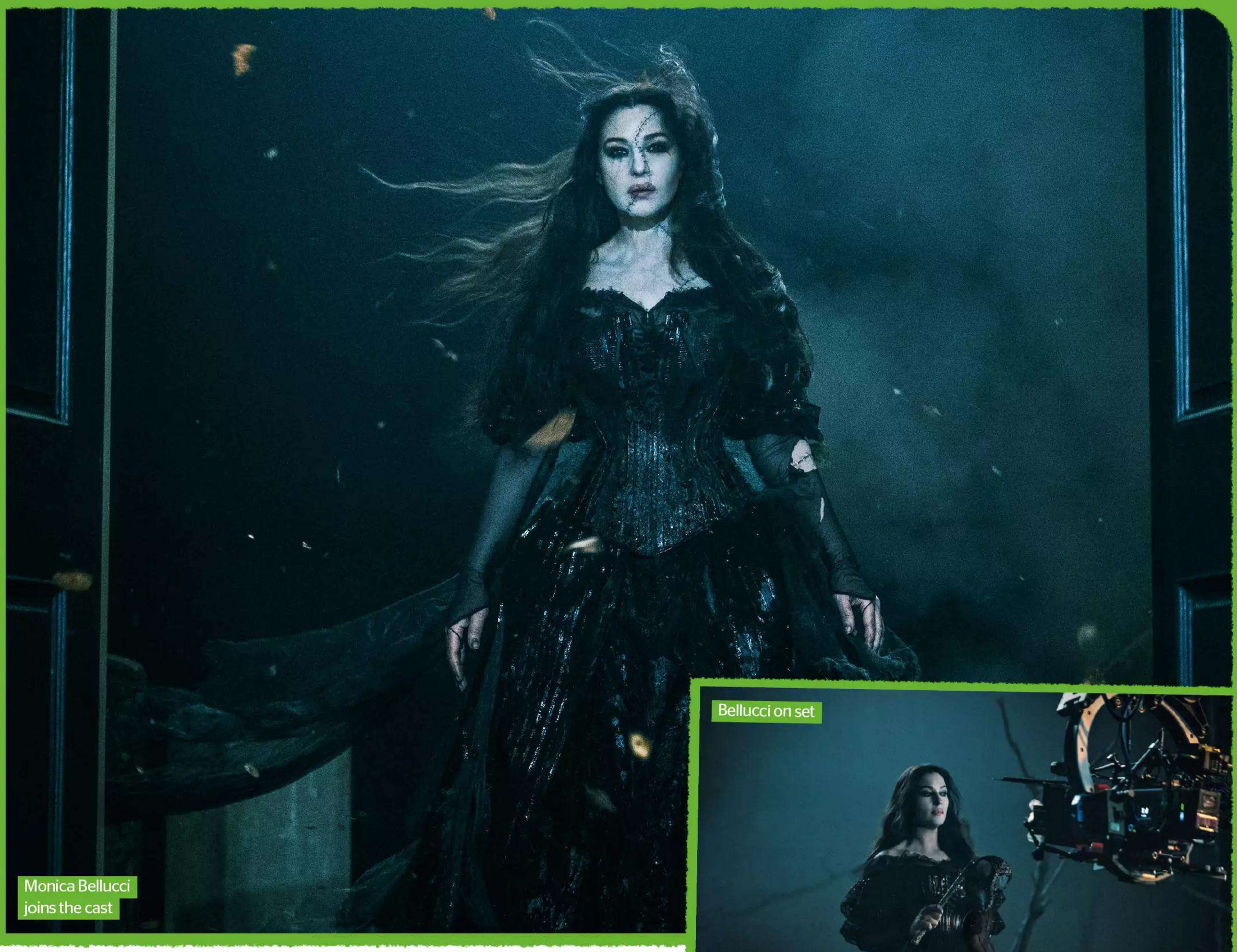
Finding the perfect actor to embody Lydia's daughter was also a major factor, but timing seemed right for that, too – she was right under Burton's nose as lead on *Wednesday*. '[Jenna and Winona] both have expressive eyes, and they express things without speaking,' Burton says. 'They have that in common. And a strength, and an individuality.' During a meeting to discuss Season 2 of *Wednesday*, Burton gave Ortega the script and told her there was a character for her there if she wanted it. 'I can't imagine a world in which I would ever turn down the opportunity to work with Beetlejuice,' Ortega enthuses when we catch up with her during filming on *Wednesday* Season 2. 'I read it and finished it in record time. I pretty much called Tim immediately after, and said, "OK, cool. Let's do it."'

> 'THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE LYDIA CHARACTER, AND WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE 35 YEARS LATER. THAT WAS THE EMOTIONAL HOOK TO ME'
>
> TIM BURTON

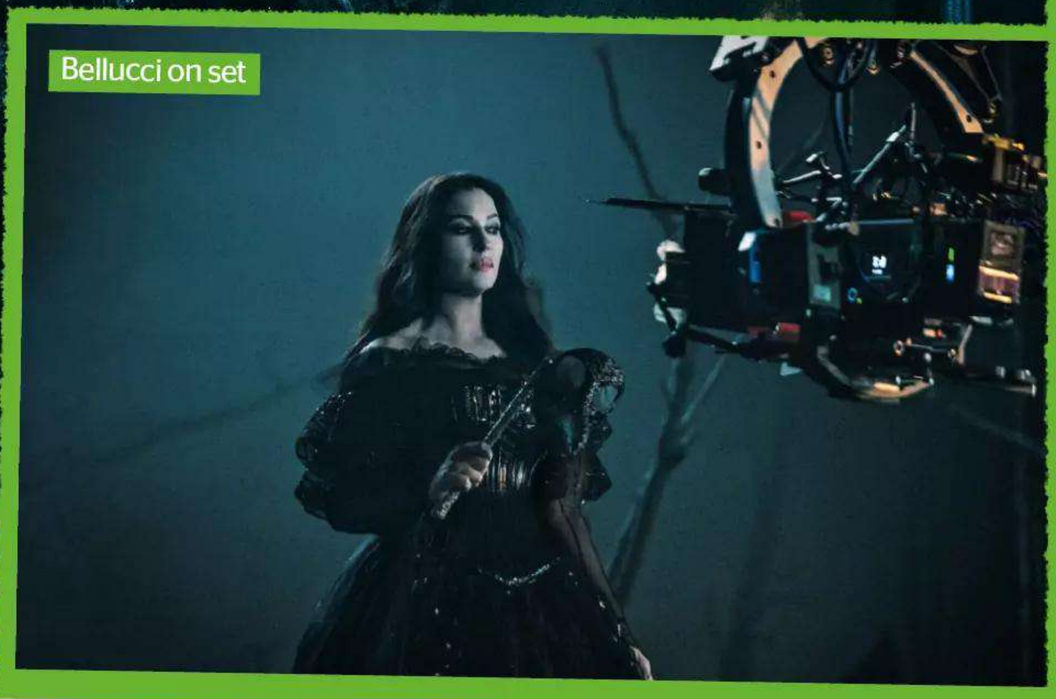
'Jenna, oh my God, I'm absolutely in love with her!' says Ryder of her heir apparent. 'She is such a magnificent presence and person, and she's endlessly fascinating with a huge heart. We first met at Tim's house – *Wednesday* had just come out. I know what an overwhelming feeling it is to be in a show that suddenly takes off. So, I just gave her a big hug and I felt instantly maternal towards her. I felt a lot like I was seeing a younger version of myself, only like she's a hundred times cooler.' Rounding out the female cast with his real-life partner Monica Bellucci ('fulfilling my dream of making an Italian horror film'), Burton put together a fast shoot loaded with physical sets and effects that replicated the scrappy, creative vibe of the original. 'We really kept it in motion,' nods Keaton, 'to keep up the pace and the energy.'

That meant spiriting up 68 sets built on sound stages and location under the eye of production designer Mark Scruton, who was very aware of living up to the groundbreaking production design work of O'Hara's husband, Bo Welch, on the first film. 'Everything should feel like if you watch the first film and you turn left, instead of right, you would end up there,' says Scruton. 'I didn't ever want it to jar.' So even though there's now a 'soul train' depositing newly dead folk into the underworld, it feels a piece of the original – all of the steps and lines in the Stockholm Metro-inspired station at odds, disco lights throbbing in the off-kilter corners. 'Everything is on an oblique angle to everything else,' he notes during our set visit, showing off the detail by dedicated craftspeople to replicate the original film's spackle effect on walls, and the pet photos adorning each shrinker's desk in Beetlejuice's office (one has a pet dolphin). 'I always love jobs where if you pause the screen, there's 10 things that you'd maybe not notice on a first watch,' says Ortega of the detail. 'There's so much in that movie, and so many little Easter eggs.'

Burton wanted to recreate the 'vibe' of the 1988 original by using physical sets and effects



Monica Bellucci joins the cast



Bellucci on set

Many of the costumes from the first film had not survived for Colleen Atwood to reference ('there's no striped suit anywhere we could find'), but new garments were made following the originals closely. When Keaton saw himself in the mirror the first time in full hair and make-up, he was startled: 'It was funny to say, "Wow, look at that. Here I am, doing this again."' For Ryder, the moment was a sweet one. 'Seeing him for the first time in make-up – I'll never forget that. Filming with Michael in the attic, I was just getting like, "Whoa, where, what? Like, what year is this?" It was a trip – all of my scenes with him were incredible. It's going to sound strange, because he's Beetlejuice and I'm Lydia, but I've never felt so safe with an actor before. He is everything you hope he would be.' Justin Theroux and Willem Dafoe, arriving on set as newbies, found the experience just as heartening. 'When I came onto the movie, [the original cast] were purring,' recalls Dafoe. 'They were happy to be there. It was a good set to walk into.'

The tactile nature of the production was echoed in Scanlan's practical effects, which tickled the cast when they engaged with them and, in going back to a handmade feel, made the emotional fireworks of the piece read more authentically. 'It's wonderful because you're not in a white room pretending to react to things,' says Theroux. 'CGI has the potential, sometimes, to make things almost too noisy and too big. When you have something as simple as Claymation or a practical effect with rubber guts spilling out somewhere, it's just so much better – you can react to it in real time. There's no room for making it too big.' Dafoe, who's had his fair share of what Burton calls 'green-screen fever' work, agrees. 'In some fantasy films, they really try to have you enter it, like entering a dream state. But here you're with the ➳

THE LADY IS A VAMP

MONICA BELLUCCI RETURNS TO GOTHIC DRAMA WITH WINONA RYDER

What's your relationship to *Beetlejuice*?
A big fan already. So when Tim told me, 'Listen, there is a key role in the film for which I thought about you' I was very happy to play it. All I can say is that Delores is really a present for me. She's a beautiful monster.

What was it like to work with Tim?
I have to say that our personal relations really helped to create something special, something beautiful. And I really love to work with him because Tim is so precise. He knows how to create something that is shocking and funny and emotional at the same time.

And you worked with Winona again after both appearing in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* back in 1992...
My first American movie - it was a cameo in *Dracula*. So it's incredible after all these years, I met her again in this one. An incredible, beautiful coincidence. It moves me. **JC**

Catherine O'Hara returns to play artist matriarch Delia Deetz

situation because everything's so concrete. It doesn't feel like it was made in post. Because it wasn't. And so it has a different kind of presence, I think.'

SAY MY NAME

Though the ethos and creativity of the first film have been honoured, don't expect a lazy retread, insists producer Tommy Harper. 'We talk about it every time on these projects – you've got to service everyone but the bottom line is, you've got to make a good movie. There will be things from the original that people will think are cool but it's all done in service to the story, not just to tick a fanbase box.' Certainly the cast who have seen the film ahead of its premiere at the Venice Film Festival are convinced that Burton has managed to pull off that magic trick that *Maverick* managed in fusing nostalgic callback with emotionally satisfying new beats. And the reason for all the secrecy is because *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* also promises to genuinely surprise.

'There's things in here that I wasn't ready for, that are beyond delightful,' says Keaton. 'I think there's probably a stronger story, and there's more of a connection for the audience in terms of the other characters. Instead of saying, "I can't wait until this thing shows up," or, "I just want this thing called Beetlejuice to go nuts."'

The Deetz family return to Winter River following a family tragedy

IT'S A KINDA (PRACTICAL) MAGIC

OSCAR-WINNING CREATURE EFFECTS LEGEND AND STAR WARS STALWART NEAL SCANLAN TALKS PHYSICAL FEATS

How did your collaboration on this come about?
I worked with Tim before on *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Sweeney Todd* and I'd been involved with some of his projects on the periphery, like *Corpse Bride* and *Wednesday*. My life is mostly Star Wars but [producer] Tommy Harper came to see me one day and said, 'Hey, we're going to be doing Beetlejuice 2. Do you think you could be involved?' Then really, it just became a sense of Lucasfilm and Warner Bros. making sure that they could cement their relationship together – to open up our workshop, which was essentially a Lucas-based workshop, to a wider audience.

Is it more fun to work on a film where the remit is as many physical effects as possible?
We're using classic rod puppets and a mix and match between make-up and practical effects and magician-style versions of doing things. I'm never an advocate of getting into a CG vs practical kind of debate, because it always feels somewhat competitive and it certainly isn't. But what's important in what we're doing here, certainly from Tim's perspective, is that we are trying to achieve literally everything practically. And our visual effects supervisor, Angus Bickerton, will remove something digitally – a puppeting rod or similar – but you don't want them to look too real. If one wanted them to look real it would go to another zone of terrifying.

Did you use any of the techniques from the original film, or have effects moved on so much since then?
I look back on what they did in the 80s as the kind of pinnacle of practical effects. We just applied our own knowledge of today and just brought them up a little bit with respect. When we showed Tim our first iterations they were maybe a little too realistic, maybe a little too modern. So a lot of what we've done on this show is to try to bring it back to that genre. The first time we saw the dailies on this I was like, 'Oh, that's a cellular memory inside of us.' **JC**

The long-awaited sequel aims to fuse a sense of nostalgia with 'fresh beats'

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Keaton insisted that the new movie must not rely on CGI

Ryder is similarly enthused. 'I feel very confident that it will match and exceed expectations. It certainly did mine, and mine are way up there. I literally think every generation can find something in it that they'll really appreciate.' Theroux and Ortega tease an ending that will blow minds. 'There is a scene where every five seconds when you think something is going to happen, it goes in the complete opposite direction. It's probably one of the most chaotic things I've ever seen in my life,' says Ortega. 'I remember shooting it, and it being all over the place. And to see it – it is so overwhelming, and it's very nostalgic, but also very fun and silly.'

'This movie takes some very big swings,' Theroux nods, likening it to watching Willy Wonka's psychedelic boat ride in the 1971 film. 'There's the phantasmagoria and it feels slightly out of control and unhinged. It has that vibe to it. It's clear this movie was not made by taking polls from audiences, and studio notes, and executives going, "Well, what's the most satisfying act three?" This is 100% like someone opening the front of Tim Burton's head, and letting it dump out onto the screen. It's a fabulous ride for exactly that reason.'

A ride worth taking again if the box office is healthy? 'We haven't talked about where it could go from here, we just talked about making one really good movie,' says Harper. 'Make it the best you can and then anything could happen.' Burton squirms uncomfortably at the suggestion of a Beetlejuice franchise or that he'd even call this instalment bigger or better than what came before. 'I don't know. That would make me sound like William Castle or something – "the biggest, the greatest, the most fabulous motion picture since *Glen or Glenda*!"' he shrugs. 'I hope for the best, really. I just feel good this was done in the spirit and feeling of the original. However the movie does, it was a very good experience for me in that way.'

BEETLEJUICE BEETLEJUICE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 6 SEPTEMBER.

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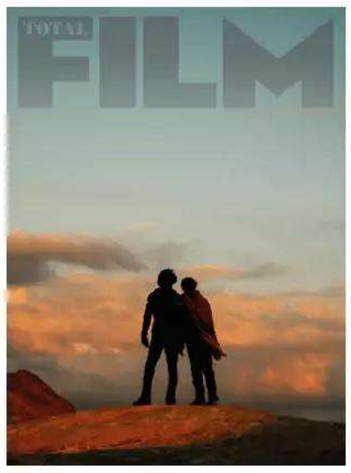

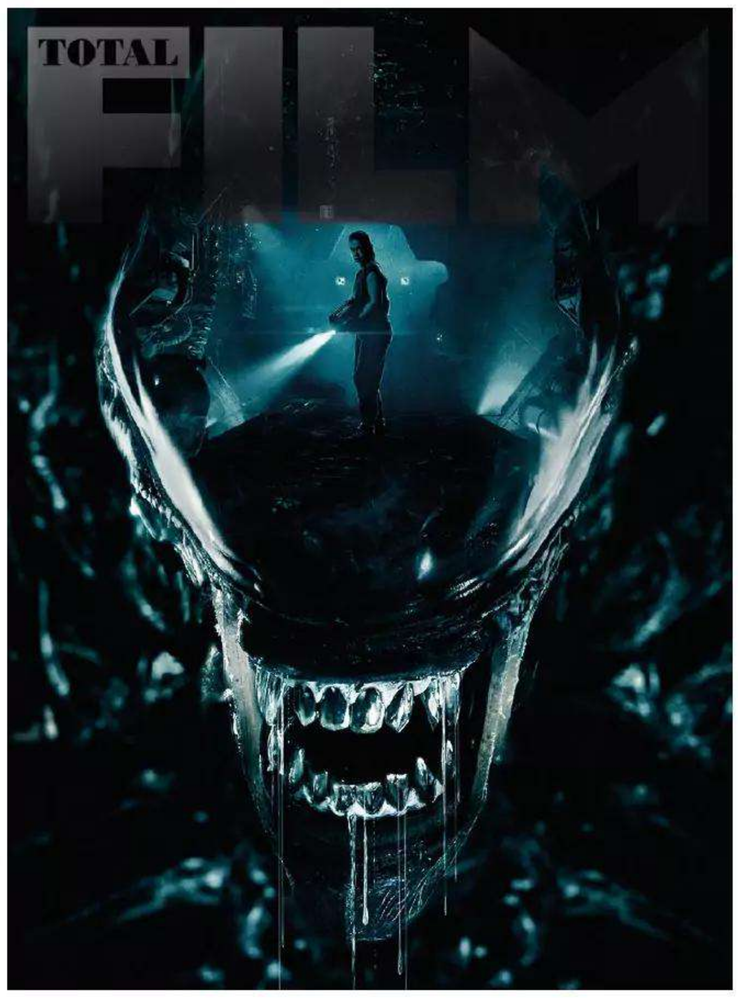

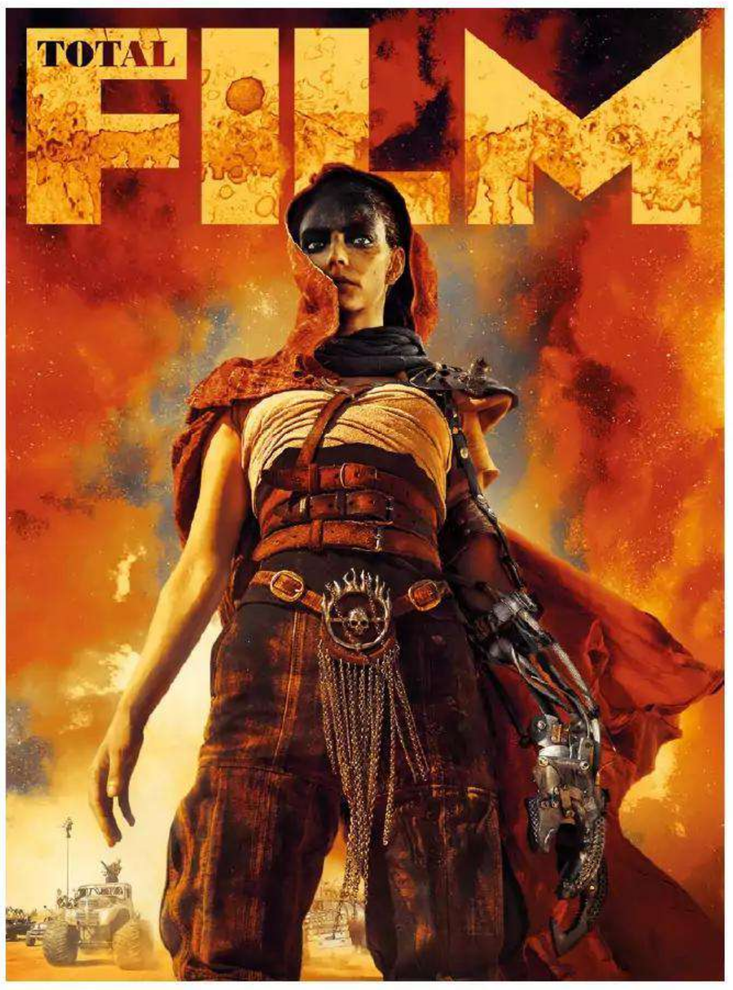

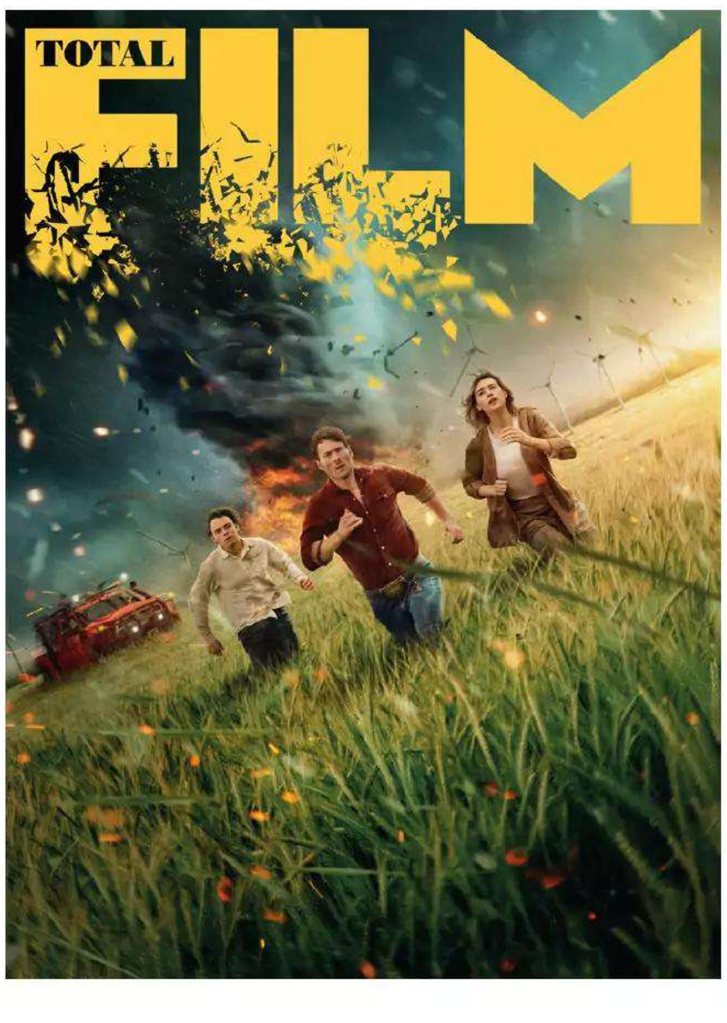

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Harkness Rising

THE BREAKOUT STAR OF *WANDAVISION*, AGATHA HARKNESS GETS A STANDALONE SPIN-OFF AS THE MCU HEADS OFF ON ANOTHER UNPREDICTABLE TANGENT. CREATOR JAC SCHAEFFER AND STARS KATHRYN HAHN, AUBREY PLAZA AND JOE LOCKE TELL *TOTAL FILM* ABOUT THE PRACTICAL MAGIC THAT WENT INTO CREATING *AGATHA ALL ALONG*.

WORDS KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER

Superhero fatigue: whether or not it's a thing, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has certainly slowed its breakneck pace of late, with just one movie landing this year – newly anointed members of the universe proper, *Deadpool & Wolverine*. But as Ryan Reynolds' Merc with a Mouth and his adamantium-skeletoned X-Man chum (Hugh Jackman) usher in a new mutant era for the big-screen MCU, along comes a witch to cast a fresh spell on viewers of the small screen – in the shape of Kathryn Hahn's Agatha Harkness.

CHUCK ZLOTNICK ©2024 MARVEL

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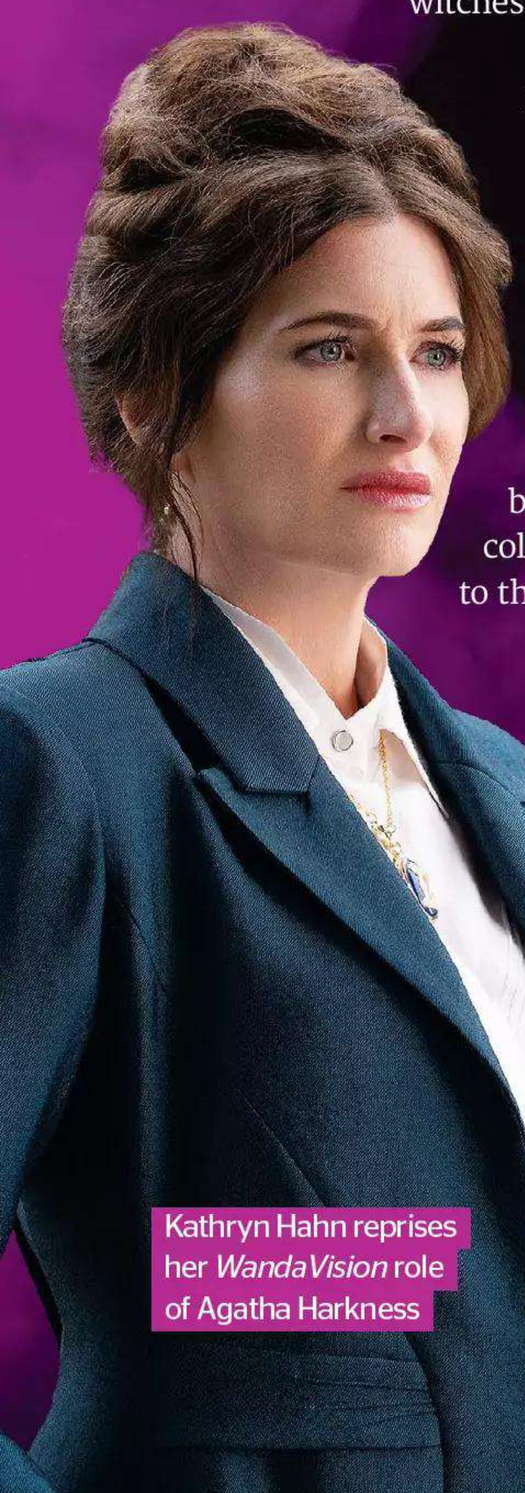
Joe Locke plays Teen, who helps Agatha on her journey along the Witches' Road

The makers of *Agatha All Along* were keen to prioritise practical effects

'The show is our examination of what it means to be a witch,' says creator Jac Schaeffer, also responsible for 2021's Disney+ show *WandaVision* from which Harkness' solo outing spins off. She's speaking to *Total Film* in one of her first interviews promoting *Agatha All Along* and admits she's just learning the boundaries as she negotiates spoiler territory. '[The series] is about survival. It is about community. And even though we were having fabulous costumes and crazy practical effects and all the witchiness that you can shake a stick at, we were always very mindful of the emotional and thematic truth of what we were doing.'

Agatha All Along – which has had a rotation of intentionally morphing titles because, well, Agatha is just so tricksy – couldn't come at a better time. There's a witchy revival brewing – audiences enchanted by *Hocus Pocus 2* have been charmed by news of a *Practical Magic* sequel in the works, while *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* arguably kicked it all off over on Netflix before that, and the latest Star Wars series *The Acolyte* has witches at its centre.



Kathryn Hahn reprises her *WandaVision* role of Agatha Harkness

MCU newcomer Aubrey Plaza plays a character called Rio Vidal – not lifted from the comics but created especially for the series – who, she says, has a 'very mysterious and intense history with Agatha'. They've known each other a long time; Hahn says they share a 'real deep friendship [that blows] hot and cold, hot and cold'. Plaza consequently refers to the series as 'elevated'.

'I'm not the biggest, most knowledgeable fan of the MCU, and I do know that the mythology and characters are taken very seriously,' Plaza tells *Total Film* over a Zoom call; she's slightly snuffly from allergies. 'But there was something kind of extra about *Agatha All Along* where it felt like, yes, we are dealing with a character that exists in the MCU, and we're honouring these characters and these storylines that have been written already in the comics… but there was something more being infused into the show, which is this idea of a woman getting her power back, and a coven of women that come together to empower each other in a lot of different ways.'

If you saw *WandaVision*, you'll know that Agatha Harkness was introduced in that series as Wanda's (Elizabeth Olsen) neighbour Agnes, a citizen of the town of Westview which was taken over and controlled with a hex created by a grieving Wanda Maximoff as a place in which to live with a resurrected Vision (Paul Bettany). As the series reached its climax, Agnes was revealed to be a centuries-old witch, Agatha Harkness, who had infiltrated Wanda's elaborate spell in order to learn the secrets of – and steal – Wanda's power. At the end, Wanda leaves Agatha powerless, trapped as Agnes in Westview.

MAGIC MOMENTS

Given that *WandaVision* is regarded as one of the best of the Disney+ Marvel series, even standing out among the wider MCU, was Schaeffer concerned about topping it? She was initially. 'And then, as it became apparent that Agatha was meant to be the centre of the spin-off of *WandaVision*, there were things that I did, because it's part of the same universe, to satisfy fan cravings in different ways,' she says as she explains how she was able to shift focus by leaning into Agatha's multifaceted character and yet still acquiesce to fan service and Harkness' *WandaVision* origins.

'THE SHOW IS OUR EXAMINATION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A WITCH'

JAC SCHAEFFER

Aubrey Plaza is Rio Vidal, who has a history with Agatha

The show picks up where the 2021 series left off, with Agatha breaking free and then embarking on a quest to regain her power. Enter the Witches' Road. 'The Witches' Road in the comics is a road… a journey… a quest that witches can go on to gain power if they reach the end,' explains *Heartstopper* star Joe Locke, chatting from atop a bed somewhere in London. Locke plays Teen, a character who helps Agatha along the way. 'The process of getting to the end is not an easy one. There are lots of quests and trials and hardships you have to go through to get to the end.'

Locke got the role in part because of his work on *Heartstopper* ('I had been a fan before we met him for this and was so charmed and moved by his performance and by that show, generally,' says Schaeffer). But he still had a rigorous audition process to hurdle – nine in total over six months, he says. 'His character is very enthusiastic and he's a fanboy above all else, and he has that sort of eager love of witchcraft, specifically,' says Schaeffer. 'And Joe just has that in his person. You can just tell that every day on set is like a trip to Disneyland.'

Speculation is that Locke's character could be Wanda's imaginary son Billy (also known by his superhero persona Wiccan in the comics) who we met in *WandaVision* and again in *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, and whose loss alongside brother Tommy prompted his mother's unhinged rampage in that film. Fans suggest that in this case, Locke's character could be eager to travel the Witches' Road in order to reunite with his mother. 'He's very thoughtful and kind, but he can act without thinking sometimes,' says Locke of Teen. So why does he want to walk the Road so much?

'The Witches' Road offers untold spoils and power… and then we'll find out,' says Locke, who states categorically that Teen is the character's name. 'It's not a fake code name; it's what everyone calls him, which is a joke that develops during the show, but just becomes what everyone calls him, and he answers to it.' The character is gay, confirms Locke. '[His sexuality] is significant in that it's a part of him, but it's not a huge element of the plot.'

INSIDE SCOOP

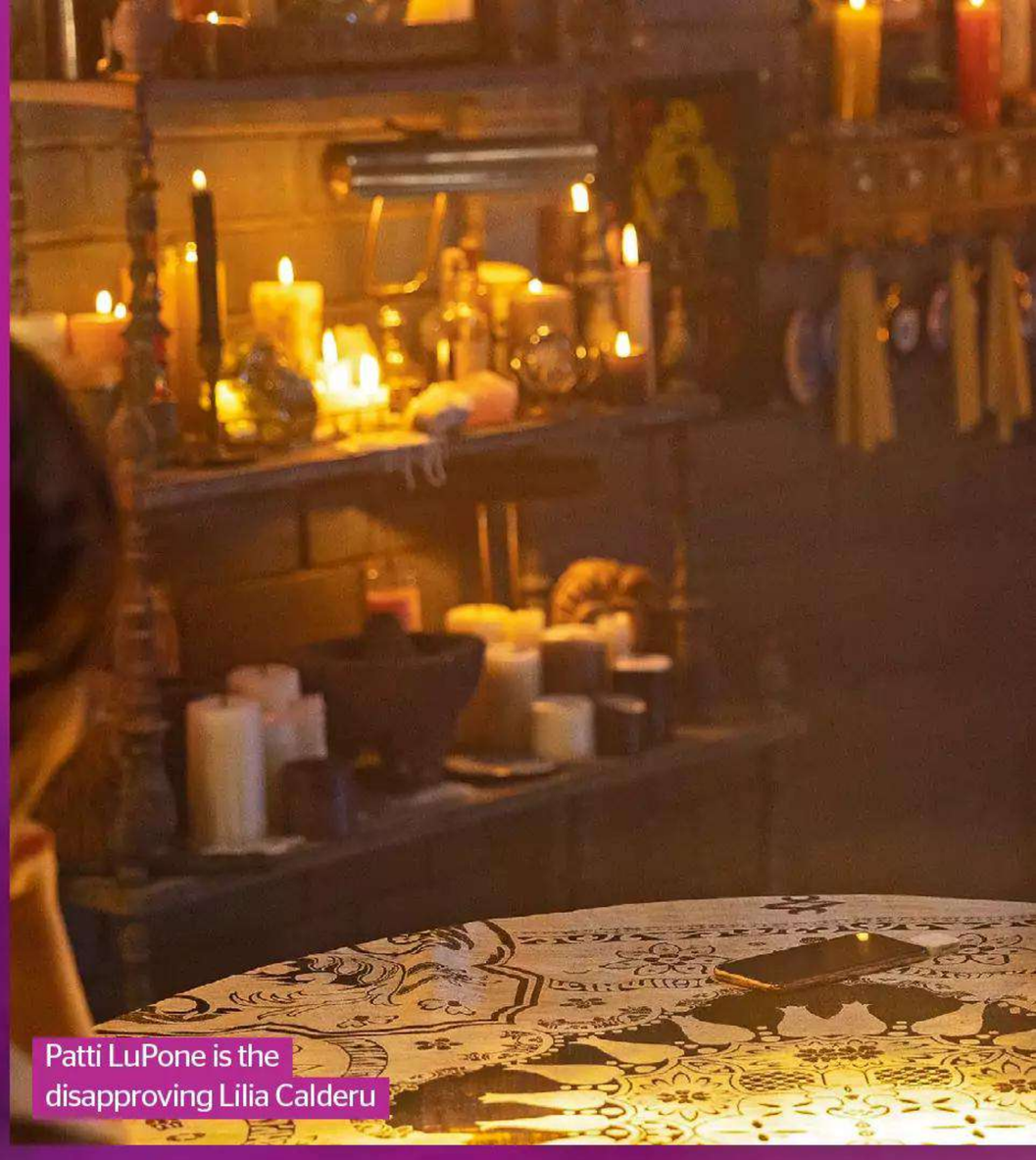
So, what kind of Agatha do we encounter in this series? Schaeffer previously revealed that we'll see Harkness' 'true heart'. Does that mean a softer side will emerge? 'I don't want to say softer, but I do want to say unfettered, a little bit unguarded,' Hahn tells *Total Film*. Like Locke, she's also lounging on a bed. 'She has [developed] a lot of defense mechanisms over centuries that builds in this – caustic, funny – kind of shell; a very, very hard wall. We got to see a lot of that in *WandaVision*.' Stripping Agatha of her powers also strips her of that wall. 'You get to see what's underneath all of that,'

'THE PROCESS OF GETTING TO THE END IS NOT AN EASY ONE. THERE ARE LOTS OF QUESTS AND TRIALS AND HARDSHIPS YOU HAVE TO GO THROUGH TO GET TO THE END'

JOE LOCKE

Just who is Teen? There are rumours he could be Wanda's imaginary son...

Agatha is not happy when she's forced to join forces with other witches



Patti LuPone is the disapproving Lilia Calderu

continues Hahn. 'That was the most difficult and the most fun to explore. I didn't expect it to be so deep.'

Hahn and Plaza both have an affinity for witches, with Plaza currently working on her third *Christmas Witch* book. Behind her, as we speak, is a wall of colour-coded sticky notes, typical of an author plotting her narrative. 'I believe that all women have this deep-down intuition and power. Women create life,' explains Plaza. 'Women have other skills and powers that men don't have. I feel very strongly that the gathering of women is a very powerful thing, and historically speaking, men have been trying to isolate women and not let them gather for all of time because, in my opinion, it's scary and powerful when women get together. I went to an all-girls school. I grew up understanding the power of women on a really deep level, and witches, to me, are just symbolic in that way. There's something, also, about a woman who is so connected to nature and this kind of Mother Earth goddess energy that makes a lot more sense to me than living in the world and feeling that there's some kind of man with a beard in the sky running things.'

Hahn dressed as a witch most Halloweens as a kid. 'A witch is able to live outside of the mainstream idea of what we think of as a woman,' says the actor. 'She's able to be scary and funny, she's able to be all those emotions that we're supposed to not reveal. She can have big feelings. She can be mean, she can be funny, she can be all the things that are not socially okay. She has a lot of freedom and I think that in between the good and bad or the wrong or right is a really exciting place to be.'

If Agatha was the antagonist of *WandaVision*, and the main protagonist here with her 'true heart' on show, does this mean that in this series Marvel continues to blur the line between hero and villain? 'A witch in this capacity… contains all the feelings, all the intentions, all the mess of being a human being,' says Hahn. 'It's like your inside voice is on the outside. So I think that contains all your good impulses and all your nasty, big, bad, gross impulses. In terms of villain or hero and blurring the lines, I think that a witch, especially Agatha, would really teeter on that edge completely. She really is selfish, and also has unexpected feelings.'

'A WITCH IS ABLE TO LIVE OUTSIDE OF THE MAINSTREAM IDEA OF WHAT WE THINK OF AS A WOMAN'

KATHRYN HAHN

WITCH HUNT

Hahn spent time during pre-production with a practising witch, but comic-book fans will be wondering just how much Schaeffer and the actors relied upon the comics in shaping story and characters. 'My process has always been to use the comics as a jumping-off point,' says Schaeffer. 'I get a tiny little bit and usually will go in a different direction. I work with a team of such talented writers and there are just so many ideas.'

The series incorporates, among others, witchy support in the form of Patti LuPone's Lilia Calderu as well as Sasheer Zamata's Jennifer Kale, who form part of the coven in the series. Both are taken from the pages of the comics. 'The characters we see that are based on the comics are our jumping-off points for where we take the characters,' says Schaeffer. Audiences will love LuPone, says the showrunner, 'and Sasheer is so fun to work with and so smart, and brought such specificity to her character. I think people will be really fascinated by the depth and the detail of her character.'

Sasheer Zamata, Debra Jo Rupp and Ali Ahn join in the fun

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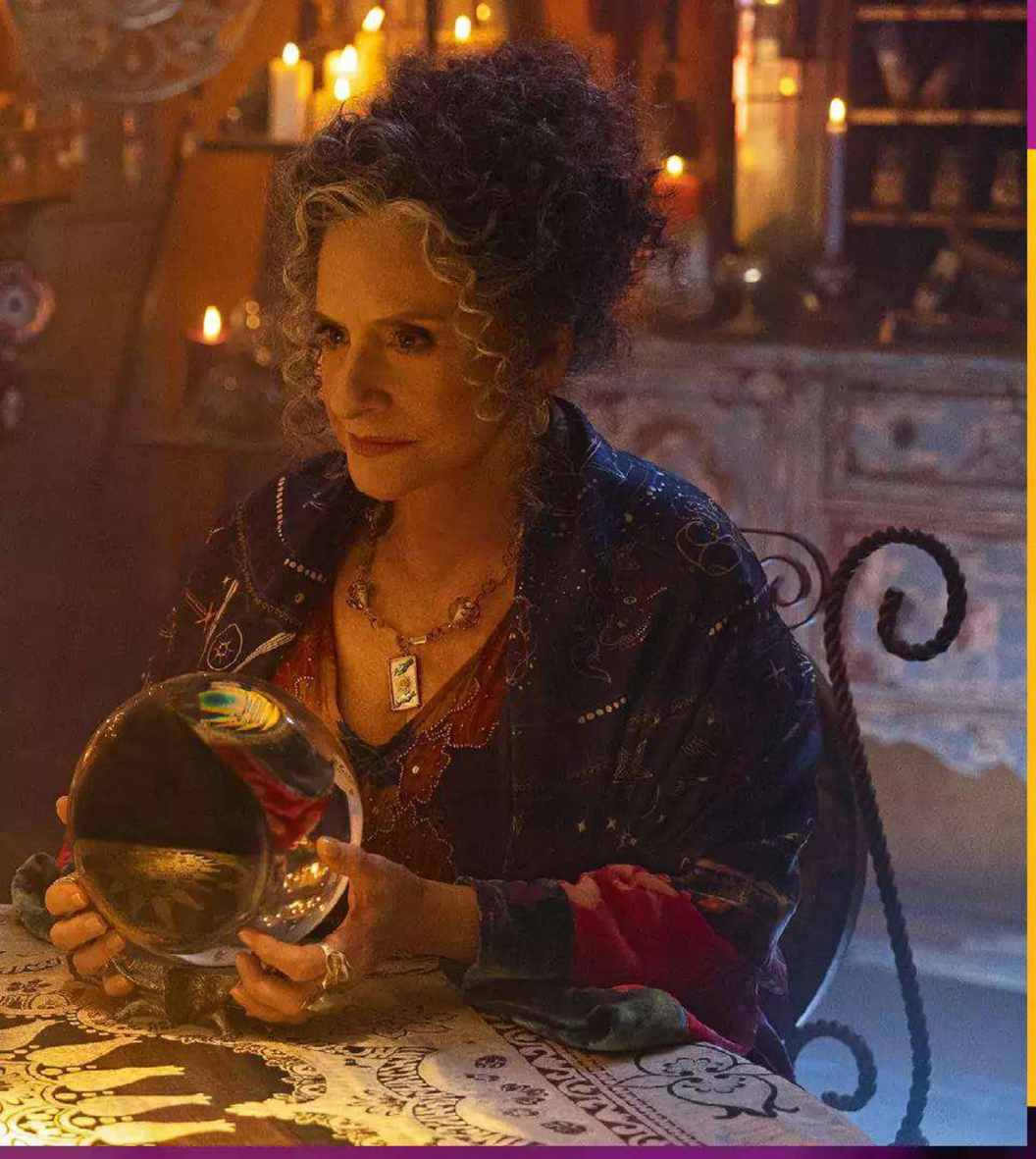

Being thrown into the company of other witches, though, is anathema to Agatha. 'She doesn't love it,' says Hahn. 'I don't think Agatha loves having other witches around. The fact that she needs anyone is, like, barf. If there's anything she could have done to get out of this needing-other-people business, she would have tried it.'

Conversations online revolving around Plaza's Rio Vidal, meanwhile, suggest she might be based on one comic-book character or another – but could she be a Green Witch? One shot in the trailer hints as much. The actor hesitates. 'I did research some stuff in the comics that was very helpful,' says Plaza. 'The Green Witch is about nature. The Green Witch is about life and death and all kinds of things. But am I the Green Witch? I don't know. There's more to those characters than meets the eye, that's all I can say.'

Well, what can she say about where it sits in the MCU? Plaza certainly feels it can stand alone.

'You could have this show and not even mention that it was a Marvel show and that it has anything to do with the MCU,' says the *White Lotus* star. 'It exists in the Marvel universe. It honours all of that. But there's something else going on here that I feel elevates it to another level; transcends it. You don't have to be the most knowledgeable Marvel fan to appreciate the show.'

Joe Locke, however, reveals they paid close attention to the wider MCU while filming. 'There were a lot of times we had to have, like, day corrections and [someone would say], "Oh, wait, no, it's this year,"' says the actor. 'My character was 15 at one point, then he was 16, then he was 15, and then he was 16 again – just to make everything fit within the MCU timeline.'

'THERE'S MORE TO THESE CHARACTERS THAN MEETS THE EYE, THAT'S ALL I CAN SAY'

AUBREY PLAZA

In a departure from MCU norm, the production relies heavily on practical effects over digital. According to Locke, they spent just half a day on blue-screen work. 'The [Witches'] Road set, the scale of it was just huge,' says Locke. 'It was the size of a football field.' It was populated with 300 handmade trees, each designed and then constructed by numerous individuals, and was also versatile. 'They were able to move different pieces of the inside of the set around to make it look like we were somewhere else, even though we were on the same set.'

Schaeffer's decision to use practical effects grew out of a desire to infuse the production with her own influences, childhood favourites like *The NeverEnding Story*, *The Dark Crystal* and *The Wizard of Oz*. 'We talked about the pleasure of [a tactile world] as a viewer and that immersive quality. It also just felt really right because we were doing witchcraft, and the way we've been defining witchcraft is it's tied to the elements; that there is something very textural about it. So those conversations intersected, and we mentioned it to Kevin [Feige, Marvel boss] and he was really for it. It felt like it would enhance the show and make it feel distinct.'

The show pays homage to a serious number of classic movies, with *The Wizard of Oz* one of the most referenced, according to Locke, who reveals that 'every episode has a different classic horror/thriller film that it is basing itself off.' If you've seen the trailer, you might have spotted a handful, and already marvelled at the practical effects. Music also play a big part. Says Schaeffer, 'There was no way we were ever going to do an Agatha show without there being a song. It became such a breakout of *WandaVision*, and I'm a theatre nerd and did musical theatre as a kid and so anytime I can shoehorn some music into anything I'm doing, I'm gonna go for it. And this wasn't shoehorning – it was a necessity to have music in the show.'

She's already told us to get ready for some songs, so with that there's just one question left to ask. Will we see Agatha's pet bunny Señor Scratchy again? Schaeffer emits the sigh of a woman afraid to reveal something she shouldn't, and concedes, 'Yeah, you will.'

AGATHA ALL ALONG WILL STREAM EXCLUSIVELY ON DISNEY+, WITH A TWO-EPISODE PREMIERE ON 18 SEPTEMBER.

Magic Moments

AGATHA ALL ALONG'S CAST SPOTLIGHT THE SHOW'S BEST HOMAGES

Marvel boss **KEVIN FEIGE** was 'very excited about the practical element of the show,' says *Agatha All Along* creator Jac Schaeffer. 'He encouraged us to commit to that and to take it as far as we could, and he delighted in all of the practical effects that we showed him. There are a lot that harken to classic movies of the 70s, 80s and 90s. As fans, that was fun for all of us.'

AUBREY PLAZA's standout reference in the series is a cult 1996 teen horror: '*The Craft* is one that I felt was really tonally coming through. That movie gets hardcore scary, and what's cool about *Agatha* is it really rides the line. There are times when it's really funny and almost has this campy quality, but then there are times that it just gets really dark and grounded and scary.'

KATHRYN HAHN loves callbacks to *The Wizard of Oz* and channelling old Hollywood magic, but also shares: 'There's some Nancy Meyers in there. There is, [as] for witches, some of the friendship of *Hocus Pocus* – the deep, sweet friendships – and also the terror of *Practical Magic*, of stuff like *Poltergeist* or *E.T.*'

JOE LOCKE identifies some horror big-hitters: 'There are some great *Exorcist* references in there. *Rosemary's Baby* was one of them. There's so many. Also, *The Goonies* – that was the one for me. There was one day that Jac sent Kevin a picture of something, and he replied literally saying, "Oh my God, it's *The Goonies*." So, that one for me was the big one.' **KTF**

The start of the mysterious Witches' Road?

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WITH THE ARRIVAL OF FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA'S SELF-FINANCED *MEGALOPOLIS*, IN WHICH HE RELENTLESSLY PURSUES HIS ARTISTIC VISION, *TOTAL FILM* CONSIDERS THE HISTORY OF THOSE WHO DARED TO DIP INTO THEIR OWN FUNDS. BUT IS SUCH RISK-TAKING CONSIGNED TO THE PAST? OR CAN MAVERICK MOVIEMAKERS STILL FLOURISH?

WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM

When Francis Ford Coppola held an exclusive buyers screening for his long-gestating *Megalopolis* in March, everyone from Hollywood studio heads to celebrity well-wishers turned up. The culmination of a career that includes such landmark titles as *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*, this $120 million self-funded passion project was his 'magnum opus', as he told *Total Film* when speaking about his 2007 film *Youth Without Youth*. 'I think it's good to be ambitious. I think it's good to be overly ambitious. I think it's better to be overly ambitious and fail, than to be under ambitious and succeed in a mundane way.'

An idea he first had in 1977, *Megalopolis* is a bold tale about power and corruption set in a near-future metropolis called New Rome, and starring Adam Driver as Cesar Catilina, an architect who visualises a Utopia for citizens. A visionary, like automobile entrepreneur Preston Tucker, the subject of Coppola's 1988 film *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*, Catilina remains the cinematic embodiment of Coppola. Bankrolling the budget through the sale of a significant portion of his Napa Valley wine empire, it was the actions of a maverick artist – the sort Hollywood rarely entertains.

Just as the critical reactions would see reviewers split when the film bowed in Cannes (our two-star review from the festival can be read online now), so it went for the studio heads. 'Everyone is rooting for Francis and feels nostalgic… But then there is the business side of things,' said one insider to *The Hollywood Reporter*, as many puzzled over how to sell what another attendee called 'some kind of indie experiment'. With a cast that includes Shia LaBeouf and Aubrey Plaza, a narrative that explores issues of time manipulation and even a moment of live, interactive theatre, it's a radical work compared to the summer tent-pole movies Hollywood is comfortable peddling. While *Megalopolis* has since found distribution in the US (through Lionsgate) and elsewhere, it's telling that not one of the majors was willing to take a gamble.

Or, just as crucially, funding it in the first place. The same went for Kevin Costner, the actor/director who also took a largely self-funded three-hour western to this year's Cannes Film Festival. *Horizon: An American Saga – Chapter 1* is meant to be the first of potentially four films telling this Old West story. But after *Chapter 1* bombed at the box office in the US, *Chapter 2* was unceremoniously pulled from the August release schedules.

While audiences staying away from an old-fashioned slow-burn western is concerning in itself, that Costner couldn't secure the funding from studio sources is also a worry. He's the man, after all, who won two Oscars for his earlier horse opera *Dances with Wolves* and, more recently, helped revive the popularity of the western through the Paramount+ series *Yellowstone*. Like Coppola, Costner dwelt on the idea for decades, right back to 1988; as it grew in scope, so did his daring. As Costner told *TF* recently: 'The reality was nobody wanted to make the first one. So what made me think they would want to see four? And I have to admit, I understand the logic of that.'

FOR THE LOVE OF THE FRAME

Yet if Coppola and Costner share anything, it's the capacity to realise their artistic visions beyond the remit of most IP-obsessed studios. Admittedly, this is nothing new. The film industry has always seen rebel directors pursue passion projects, right back to when Orson Welles made his 1951 film *Othello*. The director of *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* was strapped for cash when he arranged a deal to adapt the Shakespearian tragedy. Welles later called it 'quite an adventure'

GETTY

Adam Driver and Nathalie Emmanuel in *Megalopolis*

M. Night Shyamalan's self-funded movie *Split*

after funding collapsed and he bankrolled it himself through acting gigs on movies like *Prince of Foxes* and *The Black Rose*.

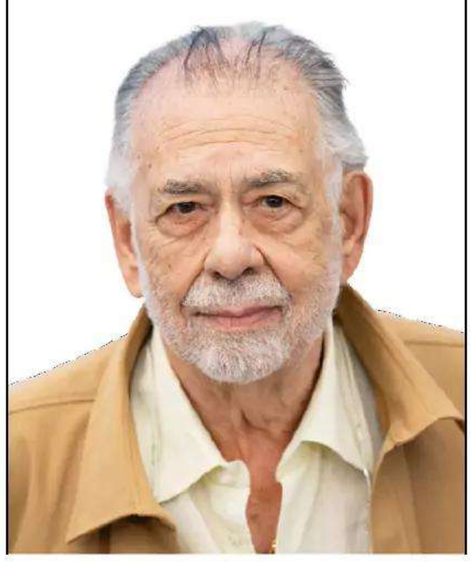
Along the way, there were changes of cast and location, while creative solutions were sought whenever money ran out – notably Roderigo's death filmed in a Turkish bath, meaning there was no need for expensive costumes. While the English-language version took top prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1952, Welles struggled to find a distributor in America for over three years. And when he finally did, the public largely proved indifferent. It's the curse of such projects, which by their very nature are made outside the mainstream and without the machinery a studio can provide to get it to the public.

Yet for every failure, there has been a wildly successful outlier – none more so than Mel Gibson's bloody, Biblical epic *The Passion of the Christ*, starring Jim Caviezel as Christ in his final days. That Gibson wanted to shoot it with subtitles, with actors speaking in Latin, Hebrew, and Aramaic, meant that he had no choice but to self-fund the 2004 project to the tune of $30 million. 'This is a film about something that nobody wants to touch, shot in two dead languages,' he famously said. And yet audiences flocked with religious fervour, the film grossing $612 worldwide as Gibson's passion (of the Christ) project proved that independent visions can flourish at the box office.

What it shows is that financiers rarely take into account a box-office track record or even Oscar glory (Gibson's five-time Academy Award-winner *Braveheart* clearly counted for nothing when it came to funding his Jesus epic). The same can be said for M. Night Shyamalan, the director who experienced enormous success in his early years with *The Sixth Sense*, *Unbreakable* and *Signs*. After a series of films that fared less well, including *The Happening* and *The Last Airbender*, he took the radical decision to prize open his own coffers.

'WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE IS FILMS THAT ARE CONSIDERED INTERESTING'

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA



Between 2015 and 2021, he self-funded four movies, *The Visit*, *Split*, *Glass* and *Old*, as well as the psychological horror TV series *Servant*. 'The reason that I do it is to do it at the smallest number where I can be free and I can do something provocative and different and unusual and I'm not putting my partners at risk. I'm taking the risk,' he told *Collider* in 2021. 'In most scenarios, because we're doing it at such a small price, we're going to be OK no matter what. So we can make the most interesting art. I don't have to think about some equation of safety. I don't have to think about that.'

Split – made on a $9 million budget – grossed over $278 million worldwide, another example of risk equating to reward. With a low budget, Shyamalan knew that he was able to make the film his way, taking a chance on a daring narrative that studio executives holding the purse

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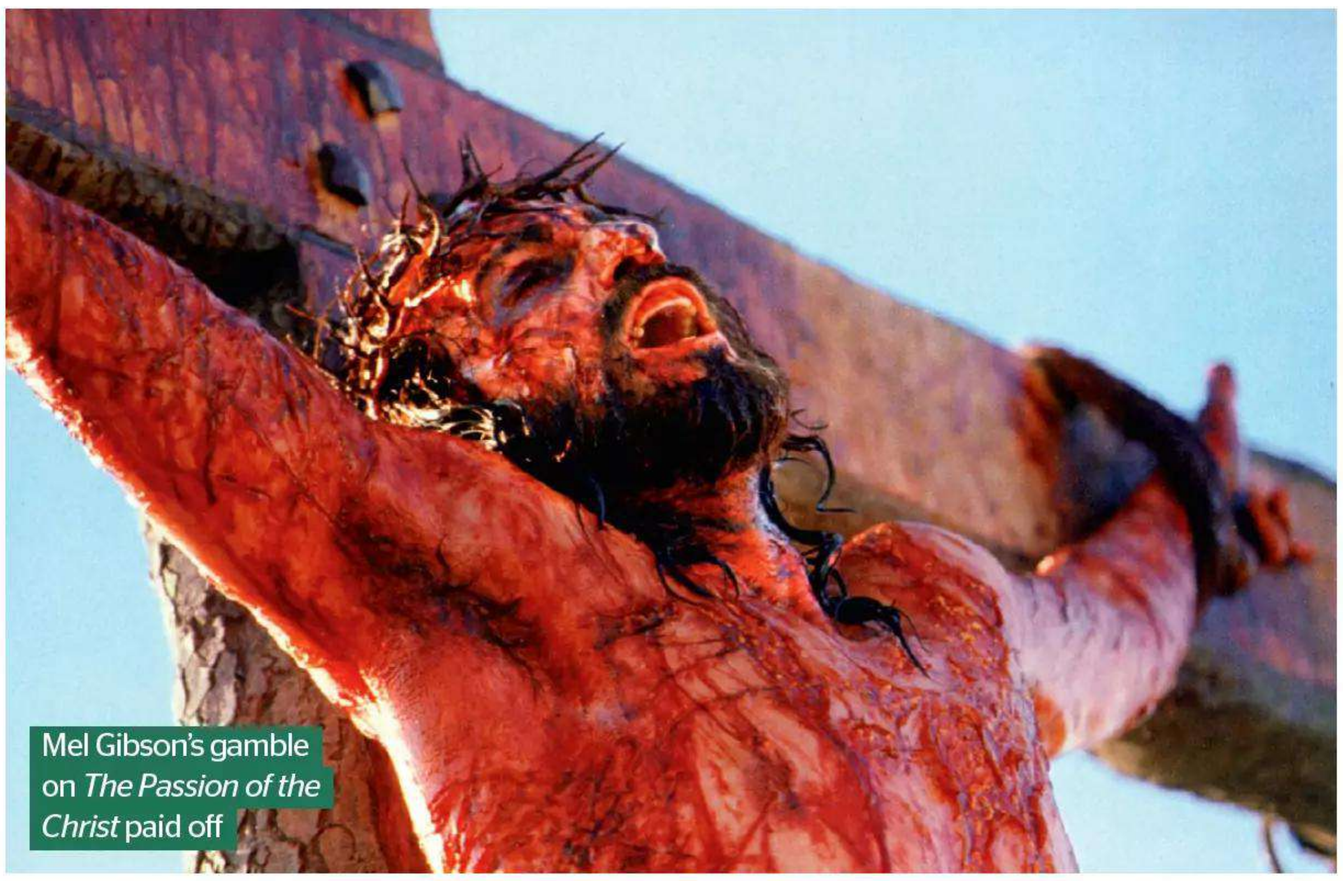

Mel Gibson's gamble on *The Passion of the Christ* paid off

Orson Welles on the set of his passion project *Othello*

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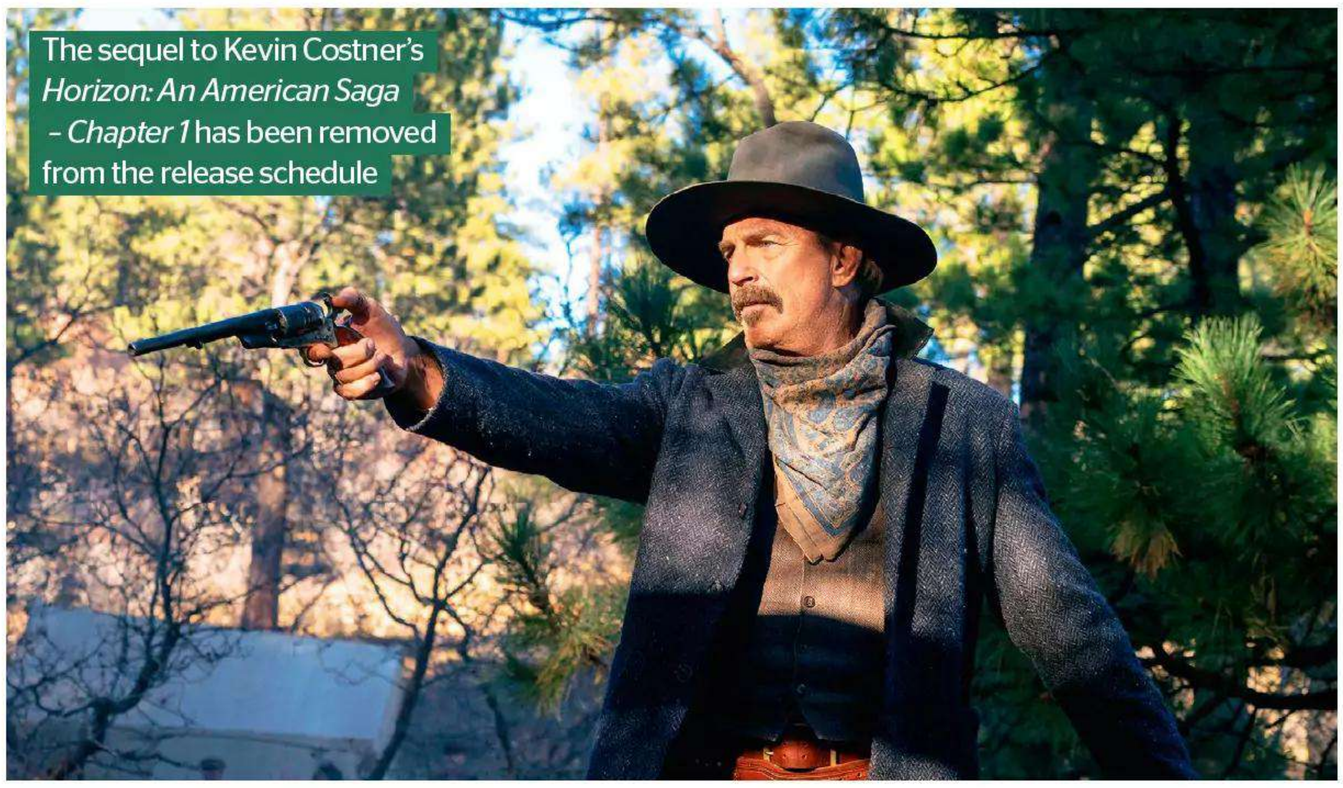


The sequel to Kevin Costner's *Horizon: An American Saga – Chapter 1* has been removed from the release schedule

Ryan Reynolds took a pay cut for *Deadpool*

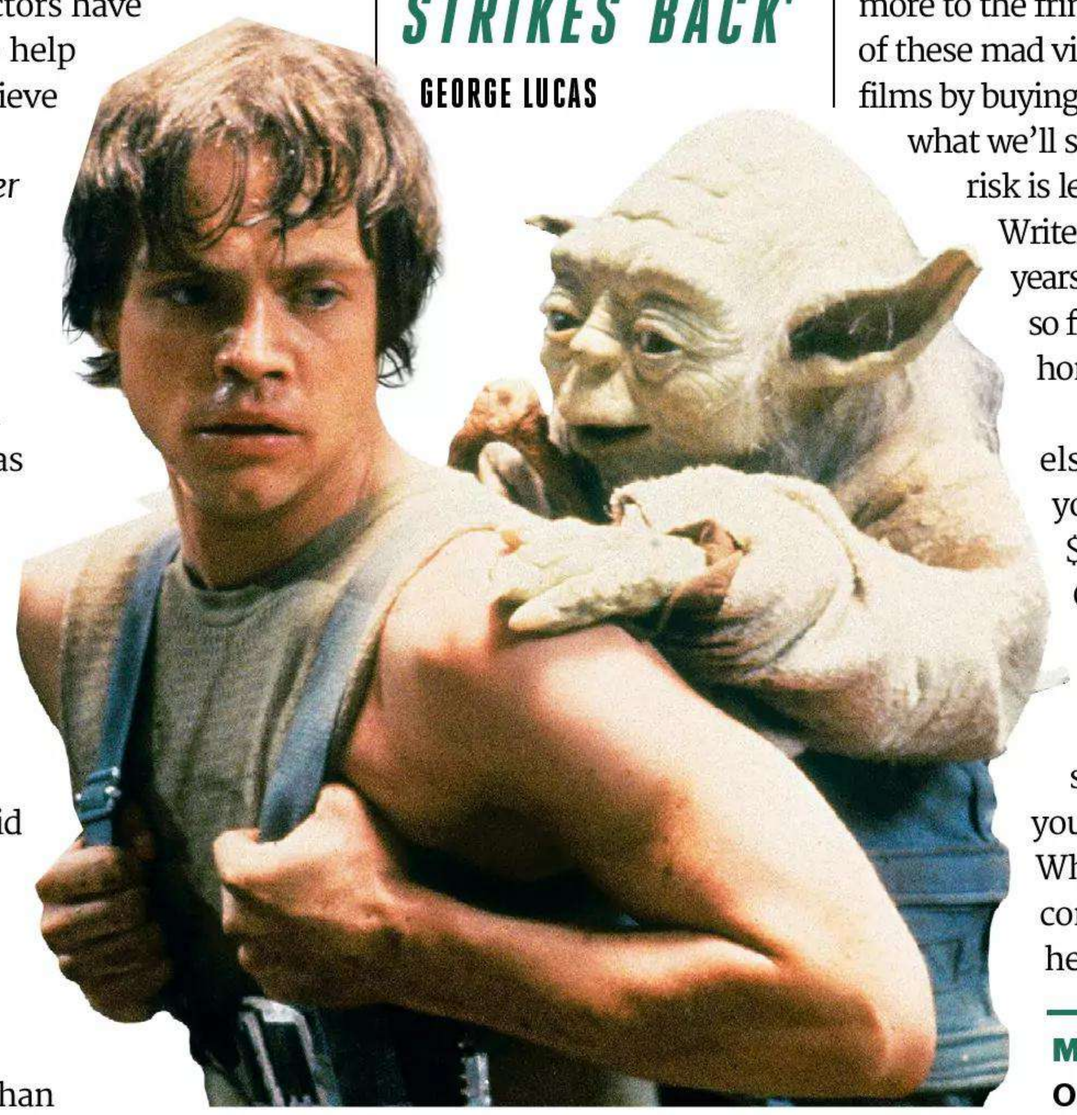
strings might well have watered down. If moviemaking is the artistic equivalent of gambling in a casino, then those that bet big can often come up trumps.

GALAXY BRAIN

Arguably the greatest example of doing this is George Lucas' *Star Wars* sequel *The Empire Strikes Back*. Emboldened by the $12 million profit he made from 1977's inaugural Star Wars adventure *A New Hope*, and unhappy with 20th Century Fox, the studio that backed it, Lucas decided to self-fund 1980 sequel *The Empire Strikes Back* to retain creative control. When the budget ballooned, ultimately to $31 million, Lucas was forced to take a Bank of America loan. 'Everything I owned – my house, everything – was put into *The Empire Strikes Back*,' he later said. But it paid off handsomely when the film crushed it at the box office.

Curiously, it's not only filmmakers forced to put their money where their mouths are. Actors have a long history of taking pay cuts to help bankroll films. So much did he believe in the project, Christopher Lee did classic British folk horror *The Wicker Man* for free, even paying for his own promotional tour, to help get the film made. It was hardly a surprise; after being in what he called the 'graveyard' period when he was frequently typecast, this was a chance for Lee to resurrect his career. '*The Wicker Man* was the best film I've ever been in,' he later said. 'The best part I've ever had.'

Often an actor simply drops their salary to work with a hot filmmaker – as Robert Downey Jr., Matt Damon and Emily Blunt all did on *Oppenheimer*. The chance to collaborate with Christopher Nolan – on what proved to be the year's Best Picture winner, with a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for Downey Jr. – was worth far more than



'EVERYTHING I OWNED – MY HOUSE, EVERYTHING – WAS PUT INTO *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*'

GEORGE LUCAS

swelling their own personal finances. Artistic integrity still counts for something, as Ryan Reynolds showed when he 'let go' of his salary for *Deadpool*, and used what little he had left to ensure his co-writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick were paid to be on set and keep the script in tip-top shape.

Still, the question remains in today's Hollywood landscape: what is the future of such passion projects? When every dollar counts, when mavericks are pushed ever more to the fringes, will we increasingly see fewer of these mad visions? Certainly if audiences don't back the films by buying tickets that will surely be the case. Perhaps what we'll see are more self-funded indies, where the risk is less, like this year's Cannes sensation *Gazer*. Writer/director Ryan J. Sloan shot the film over two years through his work as an electrician; it left him so financially stricken, his power was cut off back home while he was in Cannes.

The lesson seems to be that when no one else believes in you, you have to believe in yourself. But even so it takes daring (or a $500 million wine business to hock). As Coppola told *TF*: 'To do a movie that is a little weird or that tries to find another way, very often you have to wait for 10 years. I give up the idea of commercial success… The more unusual the film is, you're not going to have broad success… What I would like to have is films that are considered interesting.' With *Megalopolis*, he has more than achieved his wish.

MEGALOPOLIS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 27 SEPTEMBER.

Class Act

With a first Oscar nod of his career for *Rustin*, it's been a banner year for Colman Domingo. Now he returns with *Sing Sing*, a prison drama that further cements his reputation as one of his generation's best actors. *Total Film* joins him to talk about his new normal.

WORDS JAMES MOTTRAM PORTRAIT BEN TRIVETT

There's nothing like an awards season to sharpen the senses. Just ask Colman Domingo, the American actor who, this year, received the first Oscar nomination of his career for civil-rights drama *Rustin*. From the BAFTAs and the Golden Globes to the Critics' Choice and Screen Actors Guild awards, Domingo was a near-permanent fixture on the circuit in the lead-up to the Academy Awards. 'You go back home after that epic run,' he reflects, 'and you think you're going back to your "normal life" and you realise there's nothing normal any more. Things are different.'

Some might say it's about time Domingo gained the recognition he richly deserves, following extensive work in the theatre and a growing TV and film career that includes cult shows like *Euphoria* and acclaimed Oscar-winning movies like *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Already this year, he's been named on *TIME's* 100 Most Influential People list, a 'humbling' experience to be among so many high achievers.

When *Total Film* joins Domingo, via video chat from his hotel room, the actor is attending the Filming Italy Sardegna Festival, where he's been given a career recognition award. 'Received that last night,' he nods, holding the shiny statue. 'Me and Harvey Keitel.' It simply feels like the world is finally catching up with an actor who has been quietly toiling away for some remarkable directors – Steven Spielberg (*Lincoln*), Ava DuVernay (*Selma*), Spike Lee (*Miracle at St. Anna*) – for years.

Domingo, today looking spruce in a black shirt and with a gold chain around his neck, estimates these filmmakers and others found him because he's multifaceted, previously working in theatre as a producer/writer/director as well as an actor. 'It's never been just about a job for me,' he says. 'I come from a very humble background, but I think my North Star has been integrity in my work. And I can look back now at my 33-year career, and I see everything I've done had some integrity to it.'

Locked up

That certainly is the case for his latest film, *Sing Sing*, a prison drama like no other. He plays John 'Divine G' Whitfield, imprisoned in New York's Sing Sing Correctional Facility for a crime he didn't commit. His way of dealing

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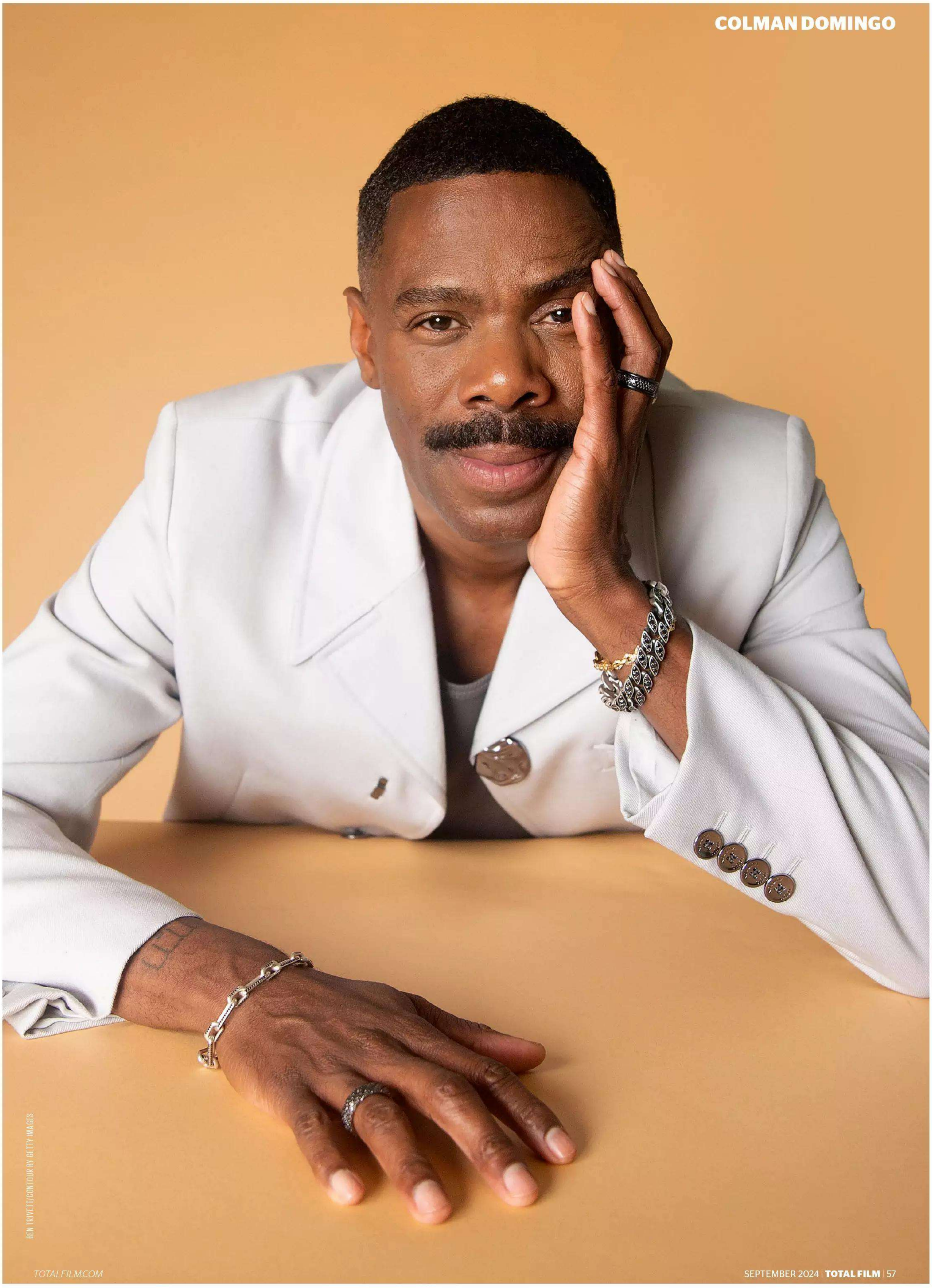

BEN TRIVETT/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

The actor found great resonance in the based-on-real-life tale of *Sing Sing*

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom saw the star as jazz player Cutler

with this horrifying situation is through Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA), a real-life programme founded at Sing Sing in 1996 that helps those incarcerated by channelling their energies into theatre. Domingo, who began his acting career on the San Francisco stage in the mid-90s, immediately responded to the idea.

'I don't just make this a statement, but theatre has saved my life,' he says. 'I can absolutely say that. I've gone through some things in my life that were not kind times, that were not lovely times in my life. And theatre was that bomb. Theatre was that thing that made me feel more human. Theatre was the thing that gave me a place to express what I didn't even know was underneath. So I know the power of theatre, and they were using theatre as this cathartic tool.'

In 2014's *Selma*, Domingo played civil-rights activist Ralph Abernathy

He's fully supportive of the benefits RTA brings to Sing Sing and those incarcerated. 'You see when a programme like this comes into an institution, how it changes it… and hopefully, then we start to smash a jackhammer into this whole industrial prison complex. I think that's fantastic. I think then we're like, "OK, this is how we dismantle this." But it's from working on the inside and helping people understand who they are, where they are, a sense of history, a sense of culture, a sense of humanity and feeling. And therefore, we change lives.'

With Domingo acting on screen alongside those who had been through the RTA programme, it helps create a genuine authenticity and rawness to the story that sees Divine G befriend volatile fellow prisoner Clarence 'Divine Eye' Maclin. While Maclin plays himself in the Greg Kwedar-directed film, Domingo also got to know the real Divine G, observing 'his leadership skills, his intelligence, the way he's created art'.

On screen, Domingo's tender turn shows his character as 'someone… trying to still find a sliver of hope and light every single day'.

Domingo hints at how easily someone like Divine G came to him. 'Because that character could be me, that person could be me. It's just circumstances. I come from inner-city Philadelphia, and I grew up with many people who had been incarcerated in some way, shape or form at some point, and that could have been my path. It's not so foreign to me to find that character and to find some parts of myself as well, someone who's still trying to find hope and light in what they can do with what's available to them.'

The actor bristles slightly when *TF* asks how exactly he didn't end up on a path to a penitentiary. 'I'm not a psychologist,' he responds. 'I don't know what's in my head or background, or the way I was nurtured, or whatever, that led me down my path. It could be something just as simple as someone who told me they love me every day or kissed me. It could be that simple. And so for me, I think that's the power of a programme like this, to uncover that stuff so you can actually figure out, "Well, what wasn't I given? What tools did I not have to navigate this, that has helped land me down this path?"'

Fresh start

Curiously, Domingo wasn't immediately drawn to acting in his youth. Instead he majored in journalism at Temple University in Philadelphia. 'I thought I was going to go into magazine production. I wanted to create content for magazines: lifestyle, photography, fashion, things like that. I was a photojournalism major and I thought I'd go to war-torn counties and take photos.' He loved photography as a hobby, even taking headshots for a while, too. 'And I realised everything I've been trying to do, I think, is the same: tell stories.'

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As Sing Sing inmate John 'Divine G' Whitfield

When he took an acting class, his tutor suggested he explore the discipline further. 'I didn't come from a family that supported themselves in any way in the arts. Being an artist was outside of the norm in my family,' he says. But it didn't take long before Domingo was making headway. While winning small roles in big films, including Clint Eastwood's 1999 drama *True Crime*, he was building his reputation on Broadway. In 2011, he gained the first of two Tony nominations – for acting in musical *The Scottsboro Boys*.

Also gaining credit for his work as a writer for the stage (on shows like *Summer: The Donna Summer Musical*), it was on TV where Domingo really began to get noticed. He was the shady Victor Strand across more than 70 episodes of zombie spin-off *Fear The Walking Dead*, up until its 2023 final season; he also directed three instalments. 'It's still a rabid fan base that loves Victor Strand, so that was a huge blessing in my career.' Then there's his Emmy-winning performance as recovering drug addict Ali in touchstone show *Euphoria*.

His younger co-stars – Zendaya, Sydney Sweeney, Hunter Schafer and Jacob Elordi – are now seeing their careers 'exploding', he says. 'When I got off my flight [to Italy], and I poked my head into one of the magazine shops, I saw Hunter Schafer on the cover of *Vogue* and me on the cover of *GQ*,' he beams. 'I think people will look back at *Euphoria* years from now and see that this was the beginnings of something really special, and how they smashed the zeitgeist. I think it's an awesome moment for everyone.'

The road ahead

Is he glad that fame is only coming to him now – aged 54 – compared to Schafer, etc., who are all in their 20s? 'I guess so. They're the modern-day movie stars. But I think they're navigating it very well… They're building an industry around themselves. I didn't know how to do [that] when I was 21 years old. I have this level of fame now where I'm able to have these things built for myself, making sure that I had inroads to success, regardless of whether institutions were ready for me.'

Much of this has come thanks to his work in Netflix's *Rustin*. 'I know my work sort of has come out of the shadows, and so has Bayard Rustin,' says Domingo, fiercely proud of playing this previously little-known activist.

'Bayard Rustin is one of my heroes. How rare is it to be offered to play one of your heroes?'

'One thing I'm very proud of, truly in my career, is to play such an unsung American hero who gave so much to civil and human rights. He's one of my heroes. And how rare is it to be offered to play one of your heroes?'

Talking of which, among Domingo's major upcoming projects is *Michael*, a biopic of superstar Michael Jackson, starring the late singer's nephew Jaafar Jackson in the title role. Domingo is playing Joe Jackson, Michael's father, who steered his children to fame as The Jackson 5. 'I love playing interesting, complex father figures, and Joe absolutely falls right in line in that way,' he says. 'I found a way to really look at the inside and the makings of Joe and how he and his wife produced some of the most phenomenal artists that this planet has ever known.'

While Domingo acknowledges he's been 'caught up in a lot of history and socially conscious pieces', he's about to shake things up. 'I feel like it's time to have a few laughs and get some stunts on.' Co-starring in forthcoming comedy show *The Four Seasons* alongside co-creator Tina Fey and Steve Carell, he'll also feature in miniseries *The Madness*.

'If people think they know my work, they're going to rethink that… because now they get to see more of my action, more of a James Bond-esque part of me.' Well, Barbara Broccoli and Michael G. Wilson are currently looking for a new 007. 'There you go,' he chuckles. 'Maybe I'll throw my hat in the ring now.' The world is clearly not enough for Colman Domingo.

SING SING OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 30 AUGUST.

Domingo (centre) in biopic *Rustin* – a role that bagged him an Oscar nomination

COURTESY OF A24, ALAMY, BLACK BEAR, DOMINIC LEON

UNDER THE SKIN

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FLESH IN

IT WAS THE TALK OF CANNES – A FULL-BORE, MAX-GORE FEMINIST BODY HORROR ABOUT AN AGEING ACTOR RECLAIMING HER GLORY DAYS, STARRING MARGARET QUALLEY AND A NEVER-BETTER DEMI MOORE. *TOTAL FILM* MEETS THE STARS OF *THE SUBSTANCE*, AND WRITER/DIRECTOR CORALIE FARGEAT, TO UNPACK A HOLLYWOOD NIGHTMARE.

WORDS JORDAN FARLEY

Demi Moore and Margaret Qualley star as Elisabeth and Sue

I always say to people: just when you think this film can't get any weirder or go any further, it does. And then it does again!' Demi Moore says with a distinctive, raspy chuckle.

The Hollywood icon is speaking to *Total Film* over Zoom from the comfort of her sofa – Moore's internet-famous chihuahua, Pilaf, in stroking distance to her right – about *The Substance*, the latest feature from writer/director Coralie Fargeat. The French filmmaker made a scarlet-coloured splash with her bloody debut, *Revenge*, in 2017, but painted the inside of the legendary Palais an even deeper red when *The Substance* screened to gobsmacked audiences and critical adulation earlier this year at the Cannes Film Festival.

'That was so moving because I knew the movie could be super-polarising,' Fargeat explains from Greece, taking the time out of a pre-publicity-blitz holiday in mid-July to speak to *TF*. 'And I knew there'd be people who definitely wouldn't be into it. But when I heard this room in Cannes reacting like that – wow, it was an incredible moment.'

Fargeat's expectations were understandable – rational, even – given the hysterical, blood-soaked extremes that *The Substance* goes to. It is the kind of film that makes the gooey oeuvre of body-horror king David Cronenberg appear restrained by comparison. And like the best of the genre, it is a film that uses excess for a purpose: to tell a story about the violence inflicted upon women's bodies, whether by men, women themselves or society at large. 'To me, that was one of the most interesting things in reading the script,' Moore says. 'It was such a unique way of exploring this subject matter. And I think it's relatable not just for women – it's relatable to us as humans.'

The high concept at the core of *The Substance* is a doozy. Moore plays Elisabeth Sparkle, an actress in the twilight of her career who loses her job as the host of a Jane Fonda-esque Jazzercise show after her chauvinistic boss, Harvey (Dennis Quaid), decides the programme needs a fresh face. Following a chance encounter with a strikingly beautiful young man, Elisabeth is handed a number to call for 'The Substance', which she is told 'generates another you… a new, younger, more beautiful, more perfect you'.

With nothing to lose, Elisabeth injects the mystery substance – and very shortly after, 'Sue' (Margaret Qualley) emerges out of a wound the length of Elisabeth's spine. There's only one rule, and it's simple: 'You share time', as the cryptically minimal instructions state. They are one person in two bodies. So while Elisabeth

'WE WERE SHOOTING IN RATHER AN INDIE WAY, WITHOUT THE BIG HOLLYWOOD SYSTEM'

CORALIE FARGEAT

MUBI, CHRISTINE TAMALET

Sue breaks the vital rule while using the titular substance - with dire consequences

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lies unconscious on her sterile bathroom floor, Sue is free to fulfil Elisabeth's dreams of fame, success and adoration as the host of the transparently sexualised exercise show *Pump It Up*. But to maintain balance, they must swap places every seven days. Break the one rule, and there will be a grave cost to pay.

BODY SHOCK

Fargeat's impetus for writing *The Substance* was hitting a milestone birthday, and the resentful feelings she had towards entering a new stage of life in society's eyes. 'The starting point was passing 40, and thinking that I was soon going to be worth nothing – that I was going to be erased, basically,' the filmmaker says. 'I had the thought, "How crazy this is, considering that I am hopefully at not half of my life?" It also led me to understand that I had committed so much violence towards myself to try to be valued, to be seen, to have a place, to have a voice.'

Pouring all her complicated, aggrieved thoughts on to the page, and into the Elisabeth character in particular, meant the film then lived or died on finding an actor willing to confront their own metatextual phobias around being a maturing woman in Hollywood. 'When I sent the script to Demi, I felt she would never, ever want to do something that was so challenging and straight to the point with those issues,' Fargeat notes. But not only was Moore willing, she'd already done the work.

'I shared my memoir [*Inside Out*] with Coralie, where I talk a lot about my own experience of some real challenges with body issues over the years,' says Moore, who met with Fargeat six times before finally being cast. 'Particularly when I was much younger, and just the torture I put myself through – being told to lose weight. I think that really instilled a confidence in her that I understood the depth and the emotional pain connected with this.'

Though she missed out on the Best Actress prize at Cannes to the *Emilia Pérez* ensemble (four versus one hardly seems fair…), few would deny that Moore gives the performance of her career as a faded star who commits a severe act of self-harm to recapture her glory days. 'The interesting part for me,' Moore says, 'was that it's the male perspective of the idealised woman that we, as women, have bought into. How we can almost get addicted to the drug of attention, of being desired, of being wanted, and then be willing to make that trade-off that's actually self-sabotaging.'

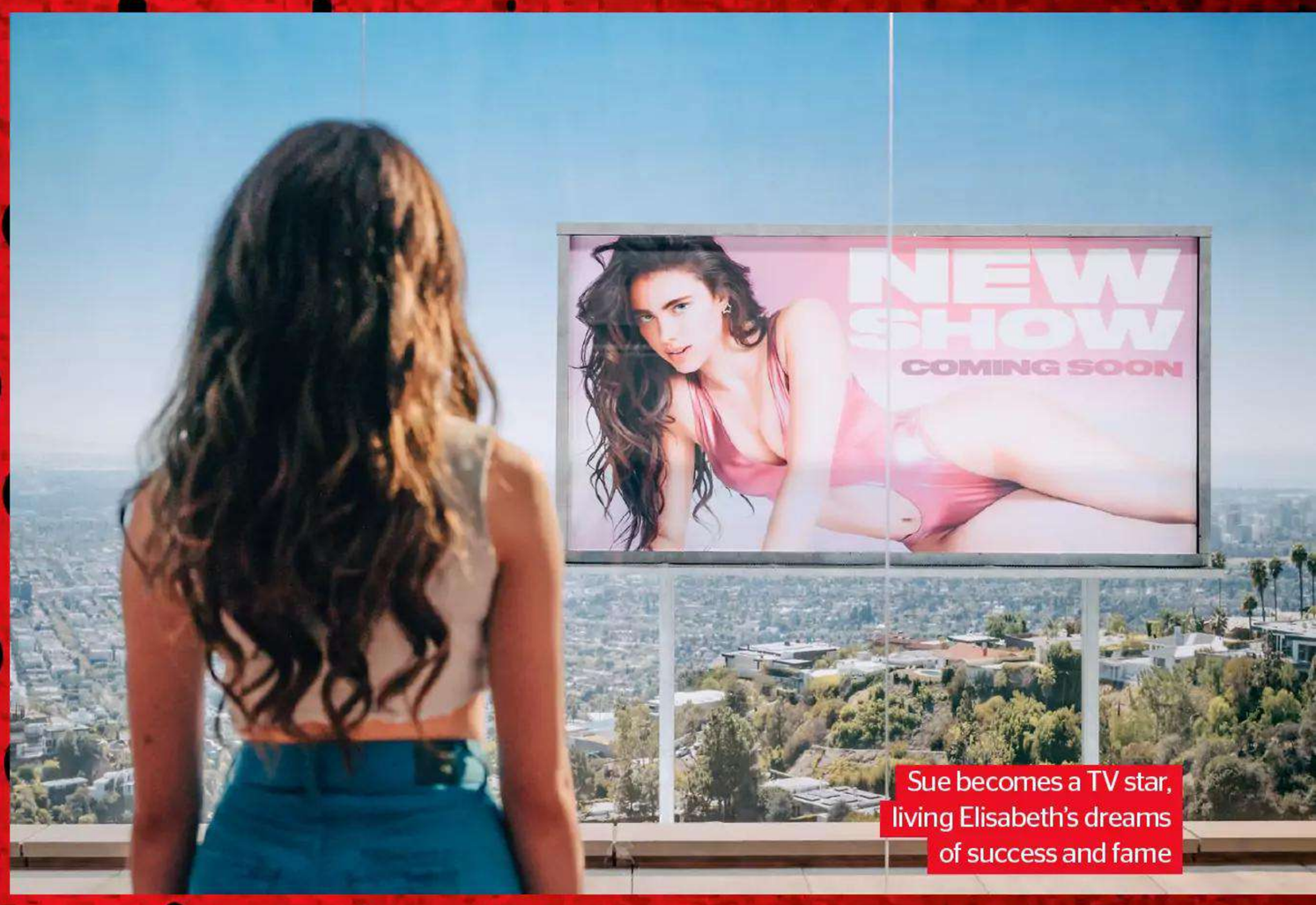
The message that underpins *The Substance* may be as serious as anything explored in an Oscar-bait drama, but the use of satire, humour and stylised excess always went hand in hand with the story Fargeat wanted to tell. 'Genre film is what I love, whether it's horror, whether it's action, whether it's sci-fi – something that takes you out of reality,' says the director, who cites South Korean cinema as the closest tonal inspiration for the film. 'This allows me to go very far, and to create my own rules, and to never have to care about logic and realism. That is, to me, my real freedom as a filmmaker. Also, I think it helps with being able to cope with the deeper things that the movie says.'

INNER BEAUTY

As Sue's sexed-up exercise show skyrockets her to greater and greater levels of fame, the objectified starlet starts to push the limits of her time in control – a few hours here, an extra day there – with Elisabeth's body decaying bit by bit as the life is literally drained from her. To achieve this gradual transformation, Moore regularly spent 'six to nine hours' in the make-up chair, with Fargeat adamant that the film's extensive and integral effects work would be achieved with tangible and tactile prosthetics and make-up where feasible.

'This was one of my biggest certainties,' Fargeat nods. 'Because the movie is really about flesh and bone, and it's really about the sensations.' Hiring French prosthetics veteran Pierre Olivier Persin (see boxout, p65) and a team of 15 or so artists, Fargeat collaborated closely with the prosthetics department 'to find exactly the right tone for all the different stages of the transformation' – aiming not for realism, but an exaggerated decay that 'gives you something to feel'. Even in the script, Persin notes, Fargeat would use onomatopoeic words to represent the 'world of splatter' which 'you don't read usually'.

'I was thinking of *The Fly*,' says Persin, who compares the Brundlefly transformation to Elisabeth Sparkle's gradual deterioration. 'At first, he has hair on his back. He's losing one nail. It's a small →



Sue becomes a TV star, living Elisabeth's dreams of success and fame

Faded actor Elisabeth goes to extreme lengths to recapture her youth

Moore used her own past experiences to inhabit the role of Elisabeth

Mirror, mirror... Moore's Elisabeth reflects

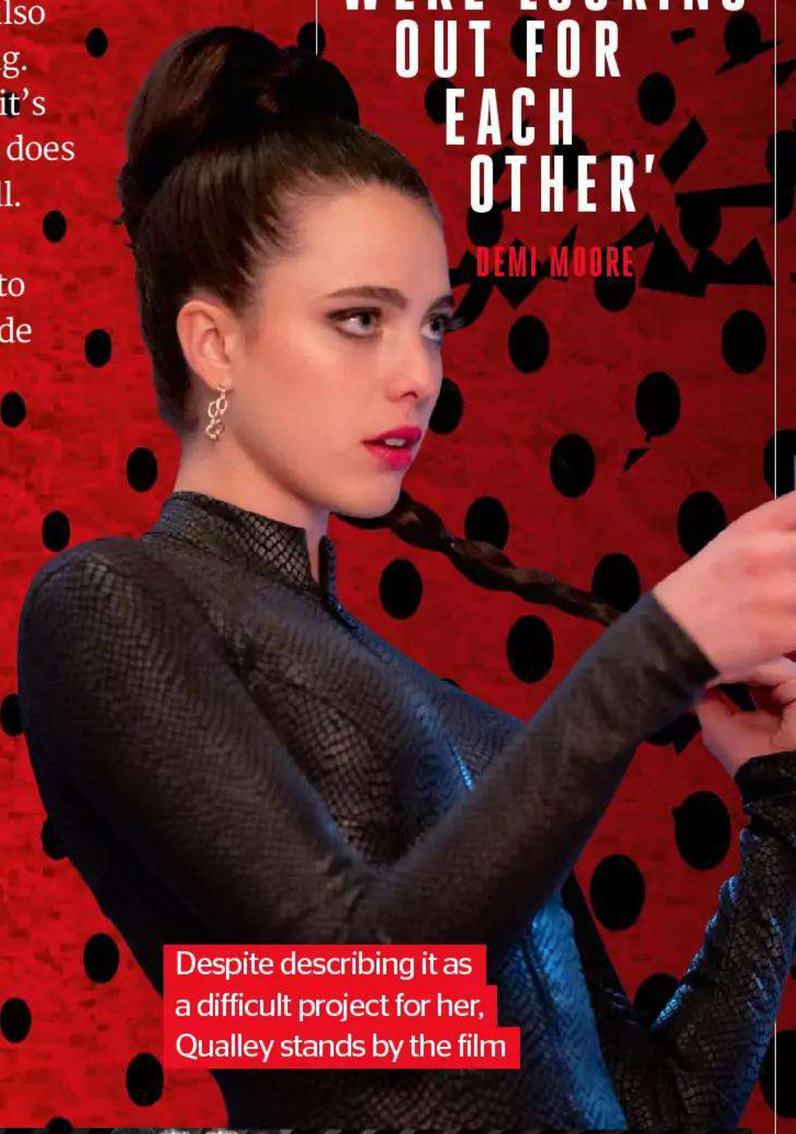
Insecurities about ageing lead Elisabeth to make a drastic decision

decay. It's step by step. He's not suddenly gruesome. So it was trying to find the right balance. We didn't want one stage to be too much, so when we see where it's going, it's a surprise.'

For Moore, the prosthetics experience was a significant first. 'I will say: reading it on paper is certainly a lot easier than what it actually is!' admits the star. 'It was also a part of what was enticing and exciting. The team was incredibly talented. But it's time-consuming. It's intense. It really does require that you get very Zen, to be still. But even with whatever discomfort or challenge – for me, it's why you want to do something, because it's so far outside of my normal baseline existence. And it was such an important part – and a unique way – of telling this story.'

Qualley underwent her own transformation ahead of shooting to play Sue, 'shaping her perfect body… and making this kind of Lolita, Barbie silhouette,' according to Fargeat, who cast the *Drive-Away Dolls* star because: 'I knew that I needed an actress that would be as strong as Demi is. She has this intensity. They work in a totally different way, but, together, they managed to create something very special.'

'I FELT REALLY SAFE WITH [MARGARET QUALLEY]. WE WERE LOOKING OUT FOR EACH OTHER'
DEMI MOORE



Despite describing it as a difficult project for her, Qualley stands by the film

Though Moore and Qualley share limited screen time together due to the rules of 'The Substance' that mean either Elisabeth or Sue is out cold while the other is in control, the two characters still share a single consciousness. But, as Moore explains, 'Once somebody is in a physical body, and they start to have their own experiences, they start to separate – which is interesting.' In contrast, the actors grew increasingly close across the unusually prolonged four-and-a-half-month shoot, primarily on sound stages in France.

'We had such a great connection and absolute ease with one another,' says Moore. 'At one point, as we were lying on the floor together, naked, we just burst out laughing, saying, "Thank God we like each other, otherwise this could be really awkward!" I felt really safe with her. We were really looking out for each other from the very beginning, just knowing how physical this was going to be, the places we needed to go.' Qualley, with a nervous chuckle, describes their relationship as 'more like emotional support

Dennis Quaid stars as chauvinistic studio boss Harvey

Director Coralie Fargeat during filming in France

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animals'. 'We were checking in on each other and having each other's backs. We were put in a lot of compromising situations and it was important we were a united front.'

HARD TRUTHS

For almost everyone involved, despite the thrill of working on a project as audacious, ambitious and well-received as *The Substance*, there is a frank admission that it was not an easy production. 'It's taking a lot of risks,' says Fargeat. 'It was a long shoot. We were shooting in France. We were doing it in rather an indie way, without the big Hollywood system around it, with a lot of nudity. But you understand where you go, and you're ready to do it.'

During an atypically open interview, Qualley in particular honestly acknowledges the challenges involved in making the film, which she describes as 'really, really hard for me' due to a 'paint-by-numbers' filming process that didn't gel with her more playful style as an actor, as well as other difficulties. It's a fact that stands in contrast to her desire to celebrate the intention, hard work and subsequent successes of the film's cast and crew.

Elisabeth's mysterious drug comes with cryptic instructions

KEEPING IT REAL

HOW PROSTHETICS AND MAKE-UP EFFECTS DESIGNER PIERRE OLIVIER PERSIN BROUGHT THE ICKY, STICKY WORLD OF *THE SUBSTANCE* TO LIFE

What was the most challenging aspect of Elisabeth's decay to realise?

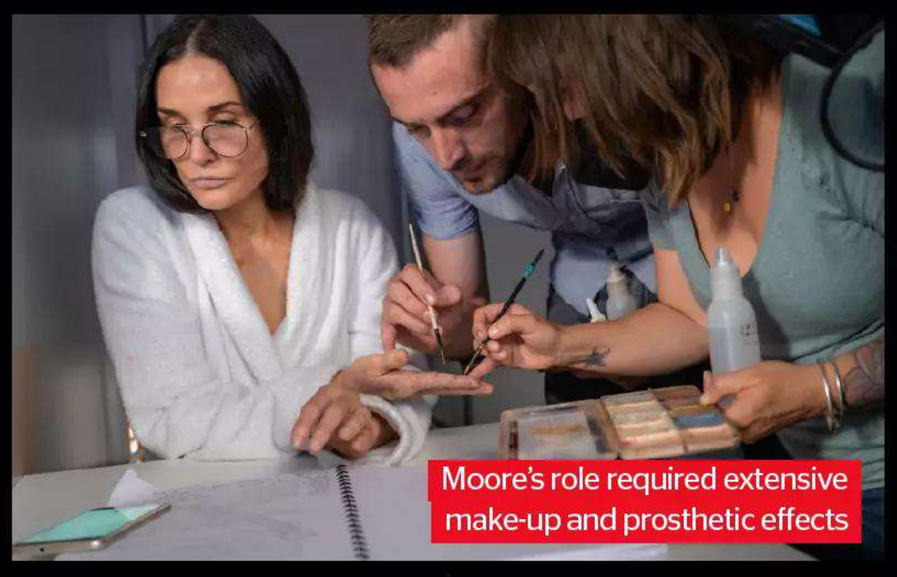
It's only parts of her that are ageing at the beginning. You don't want it to look too bulky. If you apply prosthetics, it's an additive process. So you have thickness. You don't want, suddenly, the part that's changing to look bigger when it's supposed to be smaller, especially when you have the other limbs or body pieces that look normal. The difficulty was there, I think. Really, it was to try to make the audience forget about the effects, and to feel about the journey of Demi's character.

This is Demi's first full-blooded horror film. How did you find working with her?

She was a trooper. She was amazing. She was never complaining. The only thing she asked for was to keep her dog [with her] when we were applying prosthetics! Some days we did very, very long applications. Some actors fall asleep. She was looking at the mirror. She was always with you, and standing the way she should be. She was focused. Really great.

What's the secret behind convincing prosthetic effects?

I guess the answer is two things. Some of the effects were done in a really old-fashioned way - sculpting a maquette out of clay - and some were much more, from a technical point of view, 21st century - body scans on computers and all that kind of stuff. And the other thing is that, in France, we don't shoot that many horror movies. I love horror movies. That's why I wanted to do the job. But usually I do very realistic stuff, like old-age make-up on French auteur movies [laughs]. The way they are shot, and the story they tell, they want super-realistic stuff. I put that realism into the effects, even if we had the chance to do a fantasy character. **JF**



Moore's role required extensive make-up and prosthetic effects

'It was a four-and-a-half-month shoot where I was never comfortable,' Qualley says. 'Often naked. Or wearing underwear with a big push-up bra or fake boobs, lots of extensions in my hair, lots of make-up. No time to keep up the whole workout regime. I was playing a character that was not as three-dimensional as any woman I know. Sue's perfect, but she's not perfect to me. It was gruelling and the most physically painful shoot I've endured.'

Particularly difficult, she says, was the film's *Pump It Up* sequence, in which the accomplished dancer and a team of supporting artists perform a televised workout, cut and shot like a music video with sexually charged choreography and intentionally male-gaze-y close-ups. 'I remember learning that dance I do and just fucking crying my eyes out, like, "I can't do this," just because I'm not comfortable,' the actor says. 'There was a horrible wardrobe malfunction where I thought I was going to be wearing tights or something, and I wasn't wearing tights and every time out was a nightmare. Every time I would move, the costume would bunch in the middle, so I felt very vulnerable, like I was going to expose myself.

'As an actor, you have this idea that, especially as a woman, in order to be good you have to be really vulnerable, and put yourself in these compromising positions, and I don't really know that that's true,' Qualley continues. 'It was really hard to pretend to feel hot when you so don't feel hot; that was basically my experience throughout the whole thing. The things that make me feel good, I wasn't experiencing, so it was pretty brutal.'

Despite her 'disheartening' experience, and the fact she found the film 'pretty hard' to watch at the Cannes premiere, which she attended in support of the film, Qualley says she is 'glad that people are responding to it', noting that she 'likes the message in it a lot' – something she has felt since first reading the script. 'I really believed in Coralie's vision, rightfully so,' the actor says. 'I wanted to be a part of it because I really believed in her script, her story, and her ability to accomplish it. Her incredible attention to detail. Her thoughtfulness. She cares a lot. But I know what I like to do now. I know how I'm best served.'

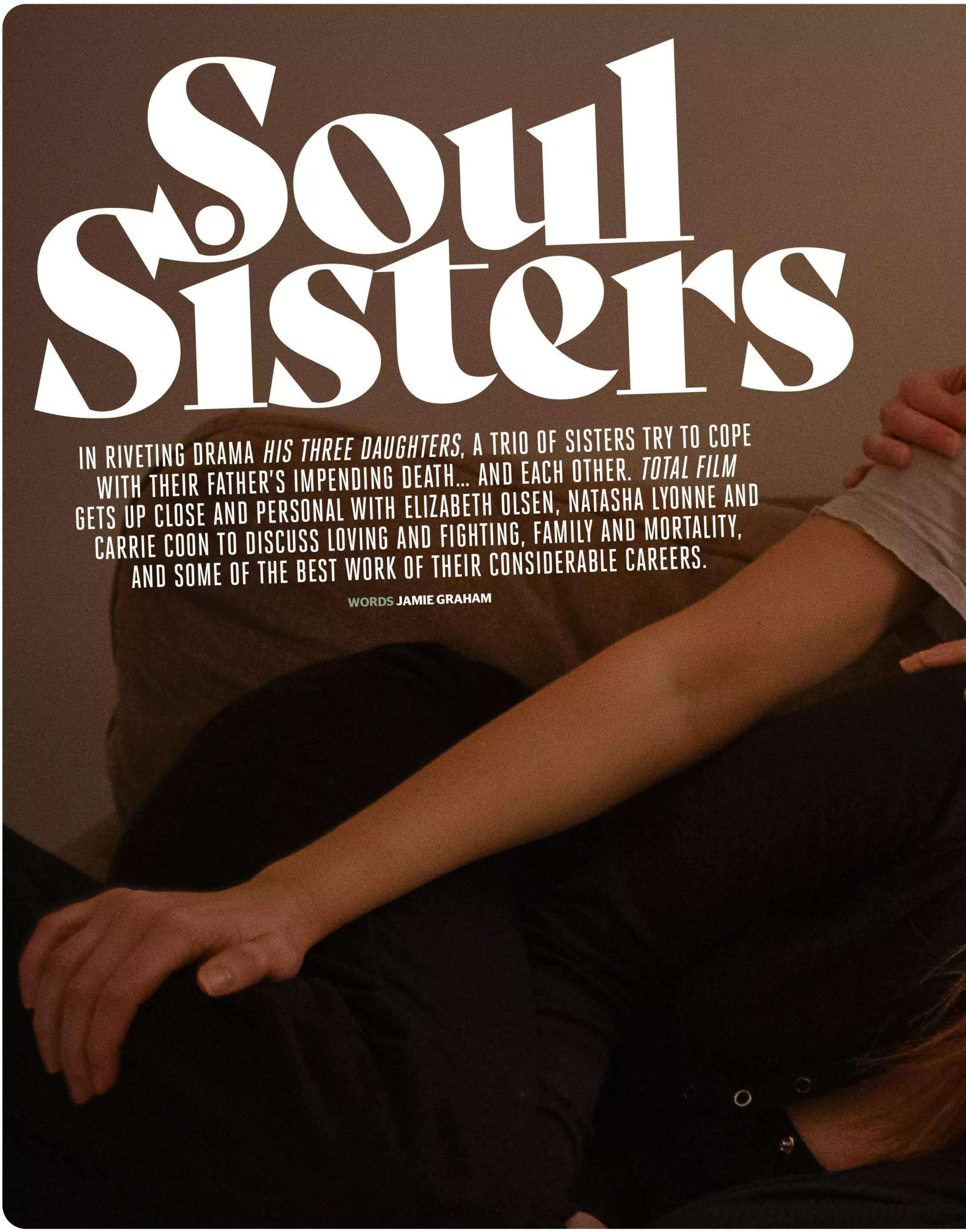
While it may be unusual to hear an actor speak in such unvarnished terms before the release of a movie they are ostensibly promoting, Qualley ultimately stands behind *The Substance*, and its resonant exploration of the unhealthy expectations placed on women to look a certain way, act a certain way, be a certain way, especially on screen. 'I do think about all the people that worked so hard to make it; the crew members that worked their *ass* off – blood, sweat and tears for real. I celebrate it for them. And Demi is just so goddamn compelling in this; I loved working with her. She's fantastic,' Qualley says. 'It was five-plus months of my life, so I'm super-happy it's amounting to something, and I learned *so* much. And sometimes you learn things from the hardest, most challenging experiences.'

THE SUBSTANCE OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 20 SEPTEMBER.

Soul Sisters

IN RIVETING DRAMA *HIS THREE DAUGHTERS*, A TRIO OF SISTERS TRY TO COPE WITH THEIR FATHER'S IMPENDING DEATH... AND EACH OTHER. *TOTAL FILM* GETS UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH ELIZABETH OLSEN, NATASHA LYONNE AND CARRIE COON TO DISCUSS LOVING AND FIGHTING, FAMILY AND MORTALITY, AND SOME OF THE BEST WORK OF THEIR CONSIDERABLE CAREERS.

WORDS **JAMIE GRAHAM**



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Premiering to rave reviews at the Toronto International Film Festival, *His Three Daughters* is a precise and contained drama about a trio of estranged sisters coming together to look after their father in the last days of his life as he dies of cancer.

Sounds like a hoot, right? Well, actually it is, writer/director Azazel Jacobs (*The Lovers*, *French Exit*) never forgetting that humour is part and parcel of life, even at its most tragic. Laughs squeeze from the corners of tight mouths as Jacobs first exposes and then examines the sisters' rivalries and resentments, and insightfully scrutinises their grief without recourse to sentimentality.

Of course, it helps when you have three powerhouse actors playing the trio of sisters: Carrie Coon (*The Leftovers*, *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*) is eldest Katie, clenched and controlling; Natasha Lyonne (*Russian Doll*, *Poker Face*) is middle child Rachel, the pothead daughter of Vinnie's late second wife; and Elizabeth Olsen (*Martha Marcy May Marlene*, *WandaVision*) is the youngest, Christina, overly accommodating and seemingly content at all times. 'They work together like a piece of chamber music,' purred *Variety* of their performances in what is essentially a chamber piece set in an apartment in the Bronx, and it feels like a rare privilege to watch three such accomplished, charismatic performers sharing the screen and wrestling with such meaty content in today's cinematic landscape.

Wanting an encore, *Total Film* rounded up Olsen, Lyonne and Coon on Zoom to get their thoughts on playing such layered characters, and to ask how their own life experiences helped them to inhabit their parts…

How did you each see your characters upon initially reading the script?

ELIZABETH OLSEN Christina is a constant nurturer and mediator, and someone who constantly hides her voice from her family because she feels misunderstood and it's not worth the effort.

NATASHA LYONNE I was dying to fall for Rachel immediately and then I was like, 'Oh no, another wastoid.' All three of us had a similar kind of feeling of, like, 'Oh, wait, am I really this sister?' But when you get down to it, there's a reason I play a lot of Rachels. In my heart of hearts, I'm a guy who sits just outside the system, existentially questioning why to participate at all according to the rules of play. But here's such a deeper dive [into that kind of character], so much more vulnerable and without artifice.

> 'Emotionally we were trying to figure out how to justify an eruption. You try to create an escalation that feels justified'
>
> ELIZABETH OLSEN

CARRIE COON I saw Katie as the responsible older child in a dysfunctional family. She was very familiar to me. I don't mind playing unlikeable people. It isn't a turn-off to me. She says in that phone call: 'This isn't who I am.' It's who she feels compelled to be in the situation. I love the way the movie examines the roles we play in families. As the film unfolds, the audience is having the same experiences as the sisters – their view is complicated. The relationship dynamics felt very real, and not sentimental. Katie strikes me as an emotionally immature person. She's infuriating to argue with because she can't see the person right in front of her. She only sees her view of that person. And she's not really listening. And for that reason, even her apologies are inadequate. I think that feels very human.

Director Azazel Jacobs (right) with Jovan Adepo, who plays Rachel's boyfriend, Benji

SAM LEVY, NETFLIX

At first the sisters tiptoe around each other, but the tensions and frustrations inevitably boil over – and we see that in a memorable screaming match. How was that scene to shoot?

EO It was challenging. We were trying to shoot in this really tight corridor. It was quite a dance, physically. Then emotionally we were trying to figure out how to justify an eruption like that. You don't want to do it just for the sake of people screaming. You try to create an escalation that feels justified.

CC We had so little time to shoot anything. We never lingered. We all realised that scene was a very important climax, emotionally speaking. We were shooting as much as we could in the order of the film, so we'd also spent a lot of claustrophobic time on top of each other in that apartment beforehand. We were ready to go for it that night!

NL That scene was nuts. We rehearsed it a bunch. But we didn't actually go all-in and scream at top volume until the camera was rolling. So when we started doing it, we did a few takes and then my voice went. It was a wild night. We went all the way. There was

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An imminent trauma brings sisters Rachel (Natasha Lyonne), Christina (Elizabeth Olsen) and Katie (Carrie Coon) together

nothing left to give by the end. We spent the rest of that night huddled up, really quiet, figuring out, 'Maybe we need to get a neti pot or something…'

The sisters thaw as the story unfolds…

CC It's in the writing. The first time you see the sisters even sharing a frame is, I believe, almost three-quarters into the movie. You only see us individually framed until then. There's nothing arbitrary about the way the movie is shot and unfolds. Even our costumes… By the end of the film, Katie's in a loose, soft sweater.

EO I wouldn't say the sisters learn from one another, but they start taking up each other's spaces. We had the time to rehearse together. We knew that we were controlling the pace, controlling the arcs. We as a company had to feel where the dramatic peaks were, and where there are lulls and hangovers from the peaks. Because of the constraints of the shooting, there wasn't going to be many flourishes from the filmmaking side.

Natasha Lyonne relished to chance to explore a damaged family dynamic

How was it shooting the whole movie in one apartment?

CC It felt like a play, which I loved. It's very language-heavy, it's shot with unity in one location, and it was such a pleasure to have the story unfold in order. We've got so accustomed now in the television world to block shooting – it's typical on any given day to shoot scenes from three different episodes. This was such a gift for us. And we had four days of rehearsal before we shot the film in three weeks. And even the specificity on that set… Everything was so lovingly chosen. It really felt like an apartment that a family grew up in. Lived-in.

EO It really was lived-in because we were just living on top of each other in that given space. And having those restrictions with the cast and the crew forces an intimacy that's

His Three Daughters delves deep into the differing experiences of the sisters

lucky to have. I loved it so much – the restrictions, the fact there's really nowhere to hide. Our limbs felt like they were part of the furniture [laughs].

CC We actually took over an apartment in New York. The residents were very generous with us, shooting at all hours. We had additional apartments that were our green rooms. Lizzie and I shared an apartment down below. Natasha was a few storeys up, to mirror the isolation that Rachel was feeling. But she'd come down, and we would hang out.

EO I loved sharing space with Carrie. She's constantly, without even thinking about it, warming up her voice, figuring out how to get in her body… It was like being with an athlete. I loved learning from her.

NL I loved it. I guess I think about the stories of David Thewlis and Mike Leigh doing [1993 black comedy] *Naked* – just how they got there and what that would feel like to actually make something that way. I do have a real love/hate relationship with the arts because I've had so many decades in it now, but the fantasy is still strong, of this idea of being able to touch something real. I have a pretty sick obsession with the truth, against my will at this point.

Did you personally relate to your characters? Lizzie, are you the mediator when you're with your sisters and brothers?

EO There are parts of Christina I don't feel connected to, and parts that I do. The thing that I found really beautiful was Christina's attention to her father and not fearing it – not fearing watching someone leave their body, and wanting to be there and share that space with him. And I do feel like I have shown up that way [in my own life]. I connected to that. It's a really hard thing to watch someone pass but then there's also an intimacy that is really profound.

CC I come from a large Midwestern family. I have three brothers and one sister, and my sister is adopted from El Salvador. And though she's older than me, I've always behaved much more like an older sister, because she moved to a new country and a new life. I took a lot of responsibility for her growing up, and we had younger brothers, so my sister and I spent a lot of time babysitting. I did always feel like a pseudo parent, even when I was young. Like Katie, when I left home, I was very disconnected because I was ready to go. So they continued to grow up in my absence and there's so much about their lives I don't have access to. We had to get to know each other again as adults, so I can relate to that [in the film]. And I can also relate to an emotional stunting that can happen in families where attention is lacking, or there's just not enough to go around. I have compassion for Katie.

Olsen, director Jacobs and Coon on set

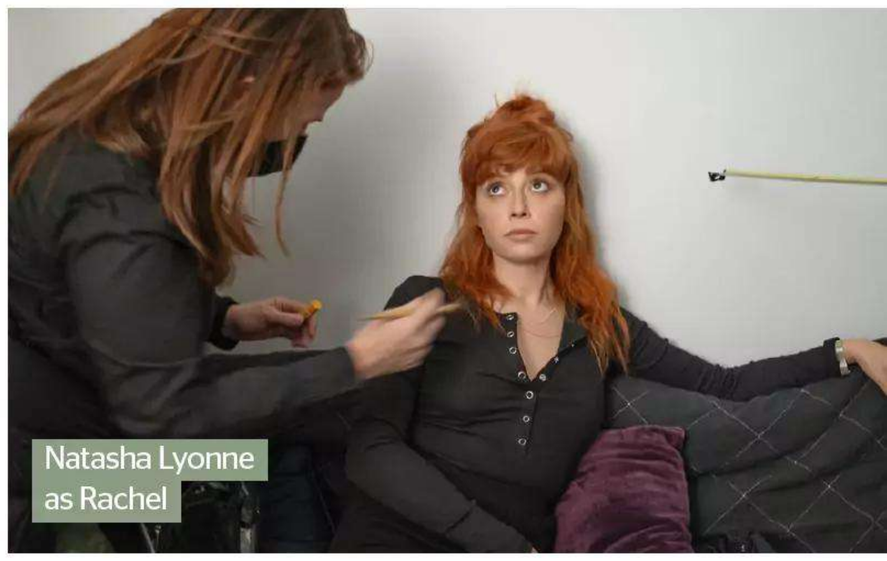
How about you, Natasha? You became estranged from your family but have a unit of very dear friends, such as fellow actors Chloë Sevigny and Clea DuVall…

NL Yeah. At this point, most of my family are actually dead. I'm so grateful to have built a world of friends. But for sure, with time, the mind is not as punishing towards the players in your own history any more. I no longer, like, blame Mommy and Daddy for what they did. I have nothing but compassion and empathy for how they got there – it's so tragic that that was the best they could do. Or that they were without tools to do better. Everything softens with age. I'm definitely not the same hard heart I was as a teenage rebel, who was like, 'My parents didn't show up for me so fuck them.' I'm more like, 'They're gone and, holy shit, it's so heavy that this was the best they could do.'

Families can offer the most love and succour, but they can also screw you up like no one else…

CC They fuck you up, your mum and dad, that's for sure. I think that love is a circle so hate is a part of it. Love is the colour black, and it's made up of all of the other colours. Your family knows you best of all. Sometimes it feels like they know us not at all, but they certainly know how to cut us to pieces. God, my big brother can really get my goat, even still. It's something we all have. Even people who don't have a family inevitably end up making one. I think it's biological.

EO The thing that's frustrating in families is there's a lot of holding on to past experiences that have identified you as the problem person, the anxious one, the one who's hypersensitive… You just become the thing that you were as a child. And it becomes this funny narrative to a family but it also becomes really damning and hurtful as we age and try to grow. That's what's so hard around the holidays. You're always going to be confined to the construct that they created from the first 18 years of your life. That creates a lot



Natasha Lyonne as Rachel

SAM LEVY, NETFLIX

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The stars shot the film mostly in story order in a single apartment

of tension, and frustration, and people playing roles. I think that's why we all love holiday movies. Holidays, you become infantilised and retreat into your childhood home. Why's this adult person sharing a bed or bedroom with someone else? Why's this happening? [laughs].

Did you draw from your own life's experiences to inhabit Christina?

EO You always are pulling from something personal whether it's directly related to the kind of relationships you have in a film or not. The things that feel not as familiar are the things that are the most fun to explore. It challenges you to think in a different way, and to defend someone who doesn't think like you. So I enjoy both aspects. The thing in your gut that inspires and gets you excited is usually a personal thing, but then also creating a headspace of someone who's just adjacent to yourself is the work. I love doing this job. There's nothing better than jumping into this other person who's you but not you.

It's rare, these days, for an American movie to deal with death in such an unblinking manner. Was that gruelling for you as actors, or cathartic?

CC As an artist and a mother, I think about death a lot. It's gotten so far from us. The commodification of death is so palpable right now. We used to have a dead body in our parlour for three days and bathed them and clothed them. We've gotten so far away from death. It's become really scary, when it's really natural.

EO I'm terrified of my own mortality and the mortality of people in my life. There have been stages in my life where I've been terrified to become close to people passing, and other times where I've been there for all the stages. I think it's a privilege to be a part of that. But I do know what Carrie's talking about… this idea of almost wanting someone else to deal with it. And then you have to deal with buying a coffin, finding a funeral parlour… It feels like you're booking a flight as opposed to a ritual.

Natasha, Rachel is the sister who's stayed at home and cared for her father for months as he's wasted away. Was it tough to occupy that headspace?

NL Rachel would sit in the imperfection of her own father, so I really had to sit with that feeling. That was what became so much deeper for me. If I had to actually sit with my dad knowing that he was dying and knowing the limitations he had as a human being, and knowing my own limitations of intimacy, and showing up… It really cracks my heart wide open to think of those people dancing around each other and actually communicating, actually helping him into bed and knowing he's not a perfect guy, and then going to sleep right next to him in the other room with just a thin wall between us. And then knowing that I suck, too. Having a movie that holds that kind of space… it's fucking gnarly.

> 'We used to have a dead body in our parlour for three days and bathed them and clothed them. We've gotten so far away from death'
>
> CARRIE COON

Let's end on a more cheerful note. How was it to work together, and so intensely at that?

CC We were all excited to work with each other. It's very rare that three actresses at this point in their careers are invited to work on the same project. It used to happen in the 70s, but some level of film has gone away. So it was already special, and it only got deeper.

EO The hardest thing is being away from home but you're not actually working constantly. There have been Marvel projects where I've worked every day for four months – 14, 15-hour days – and I'm *so* fulfilled. What's hard is when they have you around but you're not working. I loved this movie. And we just loved hanging out with each other. We were invested in each other's personal lives.

NL I was so excited that it was going to be Carrie Coon and Lizzie Olsen. They are two of the fucking most heavyweight motherfuckers I have come across. It was extraordinary.

HIS THREE DAUGHTERS IS IN SELECT CINEMAS ON 6 SEPTEMBER AND STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 20 SEPTEMBER.

THE TOTAL FILM INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW JORDAN FARLEY

‘I’VE BEEN ACTING LONG ENOUGH THAT I CAN ENJOY THE MESSINESS A LITTLE’

SAOIRSE RONAN

Oscar-nominated while still in secondary school (and three times since), Saoirse Ronan is among the most accomplished actors of her generation. Ahead of Steve McQueen’s home-front WW2 drama *Blitz* and another awards-worthy performance as a recovering alcoholic in *The Outrun*, *Total Film* meets a once-in-a-generation talent about to cut loose.

PORTRAITS MARTIN SCOTT POWELL

MARTIN SCOTT POWELL

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Peter Storm

here are early achievers, and then there's Saoirse Ronan.

The 30-year-old star of *Brooklyn*, *Lady Bird* and *Little Women* was just 13 years old when she was Oscar-nominated for one of her first performances in 2007's *Atonement*. In the near-two-decades since, Ronan has proven time and again why she was worthy of such early recognition; she is a consistently excellent performer who never fails to deliver, even when the material isn't a match for her talent.

It's a balmy late June morning in central London, and *Total Film* is sitting across from the Bronx-born, but otherwise thoroughly Irish, star. At ease in a powder-blue, ankle-length skirt and dog-eared trainers that look as comfortable as slippers, Ronan is here to discuss – among a great many things – her upcoming feature *The Outrun*. Professionally the pressure is on – she not only stars in the film but produced for the first time, alongside her partner Jack Lowden – but you'd never know it from her relaxed manner today.

An adaptation of Amy Liptrot's 2016 memoir about an alcoholic young woman who returns to her childhood home of Orkney to rehabilitate, it's a raw and emotionally complex performance that stands alongside her very best work. It also marks something of a turning point for the star, who claims that the film – alongside Greta Gerwig's 2019 adaptation of *Little Women* – 'opened up a new way of working', with the perfectionism and restraint of earlier performances making way for a looser, less understated approach. 'I realised you can make something messy, and it doesn't mean that you're not doing your due diligence as an actor,' Ronan says.

Certainly, no one could accuse Ronan of lacking in diligence. After breaking through as remorseful false accuser Briony in *Atonement*, Ronan soon headlined franchise hopeful *City of Ember*, and starred as an ethereal murder victim in Peter Jackson's divisive fantasy *The Lovely Bones*. Much like *How I Live Now* co-stars George MacKay and Tom Holland, Ronan found herself cast almost exclusively in movies for adults while still a teenager, with roles opposite Gemma Arterton (*Byzantium*), Eric Bana (*Hanna*) and Colin Farrell (*The Way Back*).

Often the standout element in flawed films (*The Host*, *Lost River*), Ronan makes small but memorable impressions in both *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *The French Dispatch* for Wes Anderson, and received a second Oscar nom in 2016 for John Crowley's deeply felt immigrant drama, *Brooklyn*. *Lady Bird*, and a third Oscar nod, followed – the start of a fruitful relationship with *Barbie* director Greta Gerwig which continued with *Little Women*, for which Ronan received yet another Oscar nomination.

Whether by choice or circumstance, thoughtful period dramas are her calling card (*On Chesil Beach*, *Mary Queen of Scots* and *Ammonite* most recently), but of late there's evidence of a desire to branch out, including a scene-stealing performance as over-eager rookie police officer Constable Stalker in comic whodunnit *See How They Run*, and opposite Paul Mescal in near-future psychological thriller *Foe*.

The Outrun and Steve McQueen's WW2 drama *Blitz* (which is set to open this year's London Film Festival in October) are up next, and further proof that Ronan is moving into the next stage of her career, with the former speaking to contemporary concerns around youth alcoholism and the

In *Brooklyn*, Eilis (Ronan) travels from Ireland to New York in search of a better life

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Saoirse Ronan plays recovering alcoholic Rona in *The Outrun*

latter promising major emotions against the most epic of backdrops. 'People need more escapism. I'm no different,' Ronan says. 'As a filmmaker, I want to make stuff that's entertaining. I want to make stuff that people can just disappear into. I would love to do more like that now.'

As well as starring in *The Outrun* you're producing for the first time. Why commit so fully?

The topic felt quite personal to me, and was something I had wanted to tackle for a while but hadn't found the right source material. Jack [Lowden] read it first in lockdown. He finished it in, like, a day. He handed it to me, and said, 'I think this needs to be your next role.' So, of course, being the desperate actor that I am, I sat down and read it. [laughs]

What stood out?

I just instantly fell in love with the way Amy [Liptrot, author] writes. She took a story that is incredibly personal to her, but a topic that is so universal, and found a way to make it incredibly intimate, but set it in an environment that's quite epic. It woke something up in both of us.

'PEOPLE NEED MORE ESCAPISM. I'M NO DIFFERENT'

How does it differ from other 'addict' stories?

It was never going to be just your traditional addict story. We were really keen to put a movie together that followed a young, female alcoholic, because I think the depiction usually involves a dude in his 40s or 50s, and he's lost his family. We've seen that, and unfortunately that's very common. But there are so many young people who experience this to such an extreme degree, and a lot of women. And because how, really, the majority of the story follows the healing process, we wanted to get behind it.

Yet the film doesn't turn away from the ugly side of Rona's alcoholism…

No. I was a complete supporter of that, because it's the most honest representation of someone struggling with that particular addiction. But also because I've been on the receiving end of it with people who I know and love. It's a particular addiction that is a part of my life, and has played a huge part in making me who I am in a lot of ways, for better and for worse. When it came to us depicting [alcoholism], it was really important that it wasn't glamorised in any way, and that it was ugly. Because it is ugly. It kills relationships, and it kills people. So I wanted this to feel as close to real as possible.

Is there a knack to drunk acting?

Yeah, because we all know the pitfalls of it: slurring speech, and the half-closed eye. I've never seen a drunk person like that. That's pantomime. However, I can see how easy it is to slip into that, because you're asking someone to depict something that they've only ever experienced themselves when they're not fully present.

I was recommended the show *The Virtues*, by Shane Meadows, and it was a friend of mine who's in recovery who said that he's never seen a more honest depiction of an alcoholic. And I agree. Stephen Graham was so unbelievably brilliant in it. So that was my point of reference when it came to the performance.

Rona and Briony from *Atonement* are both characters who commit acts that could turn an audience against them. How much do you think about audience perception when choosing roles and building characters?

I do in a roundabout way, only because I am an audience member as well.

LIONSGATE, STUDIOCANAL

When I'm reading a script, I'm reading it as someone who's trying to visualise myself playing a particular role. But, really, at its core, you have to be connected to it. With this, the only consideration I gave to an audience member was that it's a female alcoholic, and how interesting that is at this time, post-pandemic, when everyone is examining themselves a bit more. It is her own journey that she's going on, and weirdly there's something quite empowering about seeing that, I think.

You were Oscar-nominated for *Atonement* at 13 years old. Did that affirm acting as a career choice even then?
It didn't then, no. I think if anything it makes you harder on yourself because you suddenly feel like you've reached a certain bar quite early on. Which, of course, is nonsense. When you've been put in that category, even just for one performance, you're then constantly striving to keep improving. And I think that was a good thing. It remained healthy, that attitude I had towards the work. I've never thought about success; I don't know why. It wasn't overly commercial, the stuff I was doing. I wasn't a young performer growing up like the actors that are growing up now in a time that is fuelled by social media and streamers and the internet.

What motivated you early on?
I was always a perfectionist, and I was always someone who, with my acting, I would know if I hadn't done my best, and that is a driving force for me. But I will say: over the last few years – and this is probably more of a reflection of where I'm at personally – I've been doing it long enough now that I can enjoy the messiness a little bit more, and it doesn't have to be so precise or perfect.

The year after the highs of *Atonement* you made *City of Ember*, which is best remembered for not living up to the box-office hopes placed upon it…
Yeah. Does anyone even remember *City of Ember*? I liked the movie! I didn't really have an understanding of the inner goings-on what makes a movie financially successful at that stage. But also, from the very first movie that I did, which was a film with Michelle Pfeiffer and Paul Rudd, and Amy Heckerling directed it, called *I Could Never Be Your Woman* – it should have been a hit, but there were people involved that didn't know what to do with it, to put it mildly. And that didn't get the release it probably should have done. So from the very first movie that

FIVE STAR TURNS

ATONEMENT 2007
Ronan won the career-launching role of Briony Tallis following an open casting call, and walked away with the film's only acting nom at the Academy Awards.

HANNA 2011
Reuniting with *Atonement*'s Joe Wright to put a fairy-tale spin on a coming-of-age story, Ronan trained in martial arts and knife fighting to play a teen assassin.

BROOKLYN 2015
As a woman torn between life and love in New York and her Irish home town, Ronan dazzles. *Variety* called her technique 'as emotionally devastating to audiences as icebergs are to transatlantic ocean liners'.

LADY BIRD 2017
In her first collaboration with Greta Gerwig – a 'semi-autobiographical' account of the writer/director's own childhood – Ronan plays the eponymous high-school senior.

LITTLE WOMEN 2019
Ronan stood out among a stacked cast as aspiring writer Jo March in Gerwig's acclaimed adaptation. 'It's a relationship I have with no other director,' Ronan told *EW* at the time. 'She makes me feel like I can try anything.' **JF**

ALAMY

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I did, I was underwhelmed by how unpredictable the industry can be. I was quite a realist early on.

You must have had high hopes for *The Lovely Bones*, given the filmmakers involved.
Yes. I don't think this is any reflection on the movie itself, but that had so much buzz around it too early on, which meant that it could never live up to that hype, because of the amount of awards that Peter [Jackson] and Fran [Walsh] had won for their other projects, which were very different to *The Lovely Bones*.

So I have always had highs and lows when it's come to the release of a movie, which I think has actually only helped me. Even now, *The Outrun* is doing well for where we're at. But who knows what's going to happen? I'm always expecting the worst anyway. [laughs]

You've worked extensively in period dramas. Blockbusters and genre movies have been few and far between…
I want to do more of that, though. That's why I don't think you can put someone in one category. And even with me choosing very well-respected, drama-fuelled, thought-provoking pieces for the most part – I love doing that. But I'm also like. 'I've done a lot of that. I think I want to do a big movie now.' And hopefully I'll get to do that. I feel like *Blitz* is kind of like that, the Steve McQueen film. That's bigger scale, which I love. And it's nice to be on a movie that has money!

For *Hanna* you turned yourself into a weapon. Why haven't you done action since?
I want to! It's funny, *Hanna* comes up so much. I think people really love that movie. I would love to do more action, and I've actually spoken to my agent a lot about that recently, that I want to do something that has more physicality to it, I would say. The training that I did on *Hanna* when I was 15 has stayed with me. I've started properly working out again in the last year or so. The discipline that I got from *Hanna* is still there. I'm pretty hardcore when I'm training. So I would love to put that into practice again.

Just how close were you to being in *The Hobbit*?
Really close. I was supposed to be an Elf. But then they rewrote the role, anyway. She was supposed to be a bit younger. It was a choice between *Hanna* or *The Hobbit*. And I chose *Hanna*. I'm still very close with Pete and Fran and Philippa [Boyens] and their kids. They were just so wonderful to me, and I love them to pieces. At the time, the idea of being able to go to New Zealand for a year-and-a-half was a dream come true. But there were projects coming in that, as an actor, were so interesting, and that I felt like I couldn't really pass up. But for a long time, I was grieving the fact that I didn't get to do it.

You joined the Wes Anderson troupe with *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. What is the appeal of working with a director as specific as Wes?
There is a musicality to the performances that he creates that don't exist in other movies. And so actors like Bill Murray and Tilda [Swinton] and Ralph Fiennes – you've never seen them deliver a performance like that, and that's because of their brilliance combined with Wes' specificity, and how he judges things based on the musicality of it. I think to work within the confines of that is an interesting exercise. And I loved it. Weirdly, it kind of is more naturalistic than other performances that you'll see in other movies that are a lot more indulgent, because he really encourages you to speed up, and not sit on anything for too long.

'I THINK I WANT TO DO A BIG MOVIE NOW'

You left home in Ireland around the same time you played *Brooklyn*'s Irish immigrant Eilis. Did it resonate?
Yeah. Like, too much. It was too personal. I was 20 years old. I had left Ireland to move to London when I was 19. I found London really difficult as a city to crack. I was very lonely. I was very homesick. To be in such a vulnerable place as a person and an actor… I felt like I'd lost my confidence as a leading actor. It was the only time I ever got camera shy. I'd never had that before in my life.

So to feel all those things, and then to go back to the next town over from where I grew up in the countryside, it was terrifying. It's still the most scary thing I've ever done, because I just felt so exposed. And then on top of that, you're representing millions of people's stories, including my mother and my father's in some form. So it felt like a huge amount of pressure.

But the pay-off was like nothing else. It felt like such a celebration of our past, and the human story of leaving home. Which I was right in the middle of, personally, at that time. It was really intense.

SAOIRSE RONAN IN NUMBERS

4
Oscar nominations to date – three for Best Actress and one for Supporting.

$218.8M
The worldwide box-office total of Ronan's highest-grossing film – *Little Women*.

12
Years old when she was cast as Briony in *Atonement*.

10TH
Ronan's placement on the *New York Times*' list of the greatest actors of the 21st century.

30
Feature-film credits as an actor, including four voice roles.

'I JUST WAS COMPLETELY BESOTTED BY GRETA'

→ *Lady Bird* marked the forging of a relationship with Greta Gerwig. Did you feel like you were channelling Greta playing that character?
Yes, completely! She's been such a major influence on me. She's got such a presence, and she's so singular in her personality. There's nobody like Greta. I did *Lady Bird* right off the back of *Brooklyn* press. That was my first full-blown Oscar campaign, which is a lot. It's like six months of work. It's crazy. I then went into a Broadway show of *The Crucible*. I'd never been on stage before. I was in a 1,000-seat theatre. That was really fucking intense. I didn't know what I was doing. I was so terrified of that. That was when my acne developed because I was so stressed.

And then I finished that and went onto this movie that was semi-autobiographical about this woman who, as an actor, I was a huge fan of, and I really wanted her to like me. And nobody knew Greta like they do now. I just was completely besotted by her. The pressure just mounted and mounted. And it was all in my head. It was all coming from me. But, again, I was really scared.

It's easy to forget but you were still only in your very early 20s at the time…
I see in hindsight now: that's also just being a 21-year-old. But when you have a camera pointed at you – physically, you don't feel confident yet. Professionally, you don't feel completely confident. For me, as someone who always wanted to seem like she knew what she was doing, and really felt like she actually didn't – it was absolutely terrifying.

But Greta and I saw each other the other day, and we were talking about this: it was absolutely the right frame of mind for me to be in, to play that character. With Eilis and with Lady Bird – and this isn't false modesty – I was like: 'I ruined those two movies.' I did such a bad job in those films. I didn't feel like I was in it at all. I was so painfully aware of what my face was doing on camera, how I sounded, how I delivered a line. I'd never experienced that kind of self-consciousness before on camera. It was really affecting me for a year-and-a-half, at that time. But those movies ended up being kind of the beginning of my career as a more mature actor.

Yet, those two films are held up alongside your best performances…
I was listening to this Radio 4 podcast the other day about struggle, and how our generation have become so used to convenience that if anything is painful or a struggle at all – we're like, 'I shouldn't indulge in it. This is wrong, that I feel any discomfort. I can't be myself like this.'

MARTIN SCOTT POWELL

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In Steve McQueen's upcoming *Blitz*

And, actually, it's essential to your growth, and we've lost touch with that. I see now that those two films and performances in particular, and the relationship with those directors, have been the most important things that I've done thus far. And they were really difficult experiences for me as an actor – in my own head.

Around that same time you hosted *SNL* and appeared in Ed Sheeran's *Galway Girl* music video. Did you find that fame crept up on you? Or was there a moment where you felt things change?

I still don't feel like fame has crept up on me. The only time I feel that way is if someone comes up to me on the street and goes, 'Are you Saoirse Ronan?' Then I'm like, 'Oh, that's a thing that some people know.' When people talk about the work, I'm like, 'It's the work that they know,' which I much prefer. So I've never had this awareness of the fame. I don't feel it. I look at people like Taylor Swift, and I'm like, 'That girl is fucking famous. That is serious fame.' And Beyoncé. Timothée [Chalamet] has it. So I don't feel like I have that.

The funniest thing is when I'm with my partner [Jack Lowden], and I think that someone's recognised me. And I'm like, [sighs] 'I'm just not in the mood. I'm knackered.' And then they come over, and they're like, 'Jack, I love you.' [laughs] And they're like [to me, oblivious of who I am], 'Can you take a photo of us?' I'm like, 'Sure, yeah! That's right, he's the one from *Slow Horses*!'

Is it true you cast yourself as Jo in *Little Women*?

So, Greta… We did the DVD commentary the other day. I didn't know people still did DVD commentaries, but they do, apparently, so we did it. We had just made *Lady Bird*. My agent had told me that she was going to do *Little Women* next. I think she had seen me as Amy. But when my agent told me she was doing *Little Women*, instantly I said, 'Well, I'll play Jo.'

I remember, we were at an event. It was Critics' Choice, or something like that, and we were chatting away. And I was just like, 'So I'm going to play Jo in *Little Women*.' And she was like, 'Oh?' And I was like, 'Just so you know, that's what we're going to do.'

She probably knew deep down that it was the right call. I think what she said to me the other day was, 'That was such a Jo thing to do'; for me to be like, 'Hi, I'm your next lead in your movie.' So that's how it came about. It's the only time I've ever done that. But with Greta, I just knew that we needed to keep working together, and I knew I was Jo.

That character, for me, was the greatest gift. It opened up this whole new dimension as an actor where I just felt like I had so much access to so many different parts of myself, and it was because I was working with her, with that material, and with that character. That was such a gift.

***Blitz* is opening the London Film Festival in October. What can we expect?**

It's great. I saw it a few weeks ago. It is so emotional. It's focusing on the people that were left behind in the war; the people that kept things going back at home, which was the older folk, the kids, the women. And also the autonomy and independence that it gave women who were earning their own money for the first time ever. It just touches on so many social shifts that happened at that time: sexually, socially, economically, how liberated certain people became. And it's just done in a really beautiful, elegant, heartfelt way. And there is a central performance that you'll all be talking about, which is very special. And Paul Weller's in it!

You have intentions to direct one day. Who are the filmmaking collaborators you've learned the most from?

I think Greta and John Crowley – and Steve [McQueen], actually. I've learned a lot from Steve recently as well. I've been so lucky for him to have an open dialogue with me about what he's doing, and why he makes the decisions that he does. At his core, he's just an artist. There's no pretensions there, or anything. He just does it, and it's great.

I mean, who knows [if I'll direct]? I have a short that I need to make soon. But everyone says that all the time, don't they? I've always been interested in stories that revolve around children – and home. I think moving away from your childhood, and home, and the idea of that, and what that turns into as you get older, is something that fascinates me, because it's something I feel I've always been faced with. I think I miss my childhood in a lot of ways, and where I grew up, and things like that. So I feel like that's a topic I seem to be drawn to.

THE OUTRUN OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 27 SEPTEMBER.

SAOIRSE RONAN LINE READING

'YES. I SAW HIM. I SAW HIM WITH MY OWN EYES.'
BRIONY TALLIS
ATONEMENT

'You'll feel so homesick that you'll want to die, and there's nothing you can do about it apart from endure it.'
EILIS
BROOKLYN

'I'M SO SICK OF PEOPLE SAYING THAT LOVE IS JUST ALL A WOMAN IS FIT FOR. I'M SO SICK OF IT… BUT I'M SO LONELY.'
JO MARCH
LITTLE WOMEN

ALAMY, APPLE TV+

EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

★★★★★
COOL AS FOLK

★★★★★
WICKED, MAN

★★★★★
HIT AND MYTH

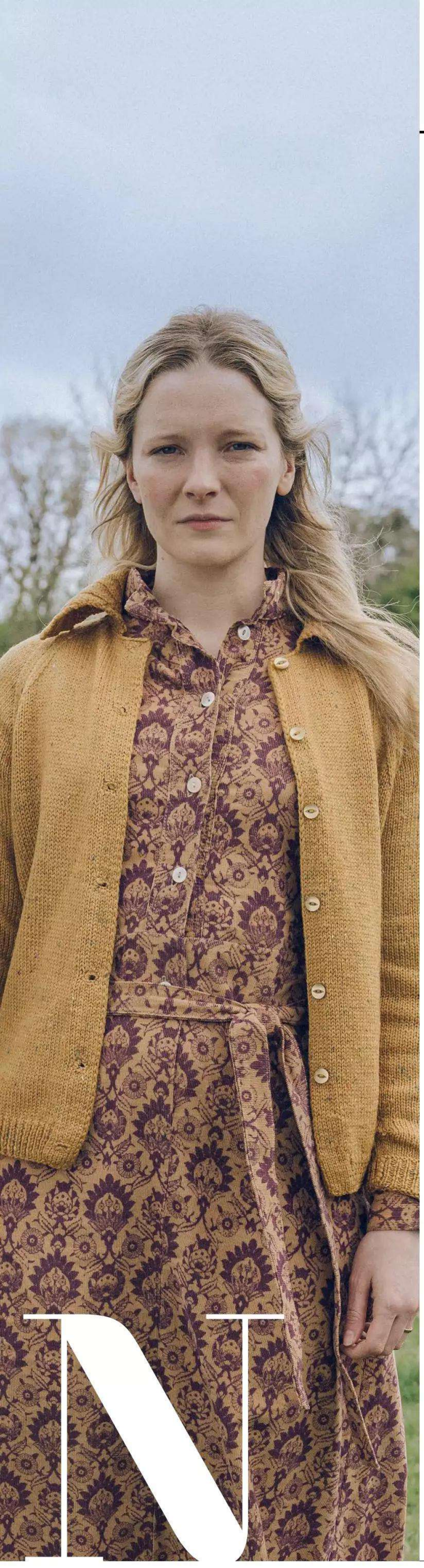
★★★★★
LOAD OF BUCOLICS

★★★★★
GO OUTDOORS INSTEAD

82

STARVE ACRE
Hare tactics...

SCREEN
THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE



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6 SEPTEMBER

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ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Alien: Romulus	16 August
Afraid	30 August
Beetlejuice Beetlejuice	6 September
Blink Twice	23 August
Borderlands	Out now
The Crow	23 August
Cuckoo	23 August
It Ends with Us	Out now
Trap	Out now

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

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STARVE ACRE 15

Put the bunny back in the bog...

★★★★★ **OUT 6 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

Richard and Juliette endure an awkward picnic

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

SAINT MAUD
2019
Morfydd Clark believes she can save Jennifer Ehle's soul in Rose Glass' startling debut.

LAMB
2021
Ewe'll never believe what Noomi Rapace discovers in this bizarre Icelandic adoption tale.

HATCHING
2022
A Finnish gymnast gives a home to an egg in Hanna Bergholm's cracked creature feature.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

I don't really know what's happening any more!' cries an anguished Matt Smith an hour or so into *Starve Acre*. And indeed, such is the fug of indistinct menace and metaphysical mystery in Daniel Kokotajlo's follow-up to 2017's *Apostasy* that one's immediate response to Smith's woeful declaration may be to nod instinctively in agreement.

Like the 2019 novel by Andrew Michael Hurley from which it evolved, though, *Starve Acre* is not a work one has to comprehend fully in order to be seduced. It is more of a mood piece, in truth: one that transports the viewer to a muddy vision of 70s Yorkshire in which nature itself seems inexplicably, implacably opposed to the presence of archaeologist Richard (Smith), his wife Juliette (Morfydd Clark) and their troubled son Owen (Arthur Shaw).

Having moved from Leeds to take up residence in the titular farmhouse Richard inherited from his estranged father, the Willoughbys are hopeful that their new surroundings will be beneficial to their introspective and asthmatic lad. It takes five minutes for them to be disabused of that fallacy, as a ghastly act of violence recalls *Equus* in its ferocity and unfathomability. An even more bewildering tragedy follows, driving a wedge between Richard and 'Jules' that he attempts to fill by literally digging into their home's links to local myth and folklore. Juliette, meanwhile, finds a comfort of her own in a spiritualist (Melanie Kilburn), stirring a malevolent entity that has been wisely kept buried for centuries.

Tapping into the same vein of British folk horror the likes of 2015's *The Witch* and 2022's *Enys Men* mined, *Starve Acre* roots its dread in a gloomy past that is mundane, real and tangible. A radio news bulletin conveys bleak warnings of impending industrial actions while the buckled headset Owen is made to suffer as he undergoes an EEG has the authenticity of a medieval torture device. The chunky knitwear Juliette and her sibling Harrie (Erin Richards) favour has the same aura of musty specificity, something DoP Adam Scarth augments with visuals that look like they have been dunked in a colour-inhibiting taupe. The upshot of this is that when strange things happen they seem to emerge from the ether, like shadows granted corporeal form or waking dreams made palpable.

DIRECTOR Daniel Kokotajlo **STARRING** Matt Smith, Morfydd Clark, Erin Richards, Sean Gilder, Robert Emms **SCREENPLAY** Daniel Kokotajlo **DISTRIBUTOR** BFI **RUNNING TIME** 98 mins

Take *Starve Acre*'s boldest conceit, for instance: a skeletal hare that, having been lifted from the soil and secreted in a box, miraculously starts sprouting follicles, veins and musculature. This is clearly no ordinary wabbit, and its incremental resurrection, facilitated masterfully by effects outfit Millennium FX, rightly fills the viewer with a fearful foreboding. Yet it's handled so matter-of-factly, in such a calm and sober fashion, that it feels like an almost logical happenstance in the weird world Kokotajlo has created. It's certainly the

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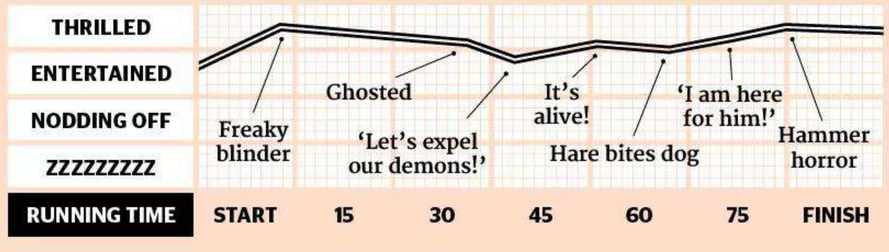

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sort of thing Smith's Doctor would have taken in his stride, the star's familiarity with fantasy making him a canny choice for a protagonist forced to grapple with the unexplainable.

Clark has the more arduous task, encumbered as Juliette is with a crushing albatross of grief. Over the course of the film, though, she undergoes her own kind of rebirth, albeit one that comes with a zeal not dissimilar to the religious devotion of *Apostasy*'s Jehovah's Witnesses. Having that film's Robert Emms play Richard's academic friend provides additional connective tissue with Kokotajlo's debut. A brief excerpt of a youthful Donald Sutherland in 1964's *Hamlet at Elsinore*, meanwhile, can't help but summon memories of *Don't Look Now*, as does a later interlude that sees Smith and

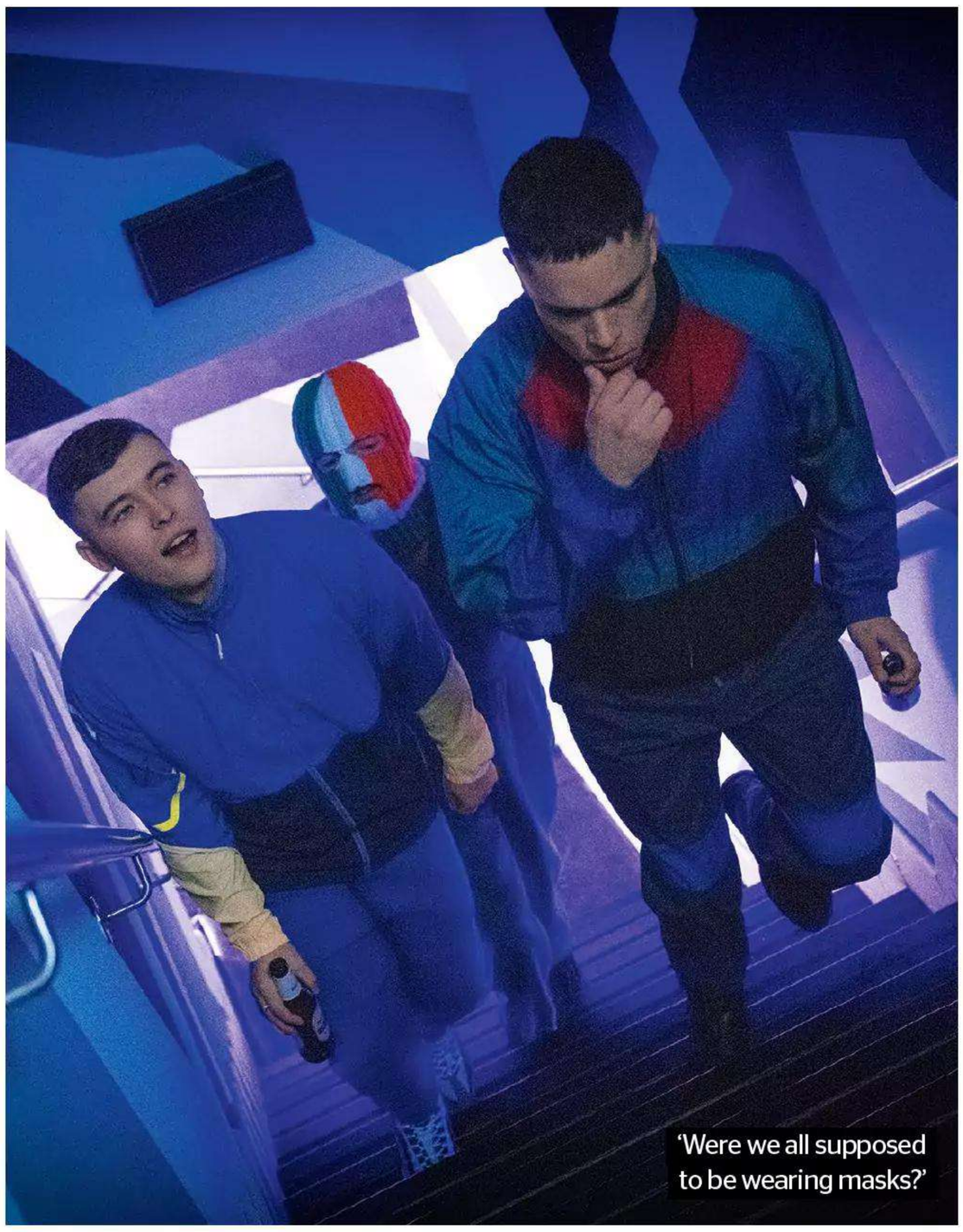
'When strange things happen they seem to emerge from the ether, like waking dreams made palpable'

Clark reconnecting through a bout of passionate, wound-healing lovemaking.

Kokotajlo has been upfront about his many inspirations, from Quatermass creator Nigel Kneale to ghost story maestro M.R. James. And there is indeed a sense that *Starve Acre* feels beholden to others, to the extent perhaps of it lacking an individual identity. A scene featuring Richard in a phone booth is only one of many nods to *Rosemary's Baby*, while films like *Lamb* and *Hatching* have made the inception of freakish critters something of a horror staple of late. There is reason, then, to celebrate composer Matthew Herbert for an eerie wind-based score that sounds like nothing heard on this planet, not to mention a séance scene mercifully bereft of the campy excesses we witnessed in last year's *A Haunting in Venice*.

'You've hit the jackpot!' exults Emms' character Steven after Richard unearths the stump of an ancient oak tree with huge pagan significance. Audiences may feel similar elation at Kokotajlo's ongoing maturation into one of our most composed and rigorous storytellers. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT A chilling and unnerving retro spine-tingler, with an animatronic hare so lifelike it deserves its own credit.


'Were we all supposed to be wearing masks?'

KNEECAP 18

Rappers' Delight...

★★★★★ **OUT 23 AUGUST** CINEMAS

Sometimes change hits like a filthy bass line,' we're told in this fictionalised biopic of the titular Belfast hip-hop trio. Underpinned by themes of language and identity, Rich Peppiatt's rude, raucous film hits just that way, remixing music-movie clichés to Kneecap's rebel tune with galvanising verve.

Friends, drug dealers and pro-republicans, Liam Óg Ó Hannaidh (stage name: Mo Chara) and Naoise Ó Caireallán (Móglaí Bap) find their calling when the latter's arrested. Tasked to translate Naoise's Irish for English-speaking cops, teacher JJ Ó Dochartaigh (DJ Próvaí) sets Naoise's notebook rhymes to music. Soon gigging in pubs, the Irish-language rappers scrawl 'Brits Out' slogans on their arses, mistake ketamine for coke, call for change and, inevitably, draw the attention of the 'Peelers' and worse.

Mixing fiction/reality, comedy/drama and more, Peppiatt treads tonal high wires confidently. Alongside pro turns from Michael Fassbender (Naoise's terrorist dad), Simone Kirby (Naoise's mum) and others, the tracksuited title trio's natural presence carries the film assuredly. Grounding events in near-truth, Peppiatt also flaunts energising shows of formal playfulness and wit, albeit with debts to *Trainspotting*.

Amid some outlandish detours, a call to recognise the Irish language is cannily handled. Even as the climax threatens to turn sober, the blistering soundtrack rectifies that risk: cutting to Kneecap in concert, Peppiatt fuels the film's message with exhilarating life. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT A mosh pit of bawdy humour and energy, *Kneecap* lands its ideas with bracingly entertaining vigour.

SING SING 15

Bard time...

★★★★★ **OUT 30 AUGUST** CINEMAS

A thoughtful US prison story that swerves *Felon*-style yard fights for rehearsal-room revelations, Greg Kwedar's powerful reality-based drama explores the redemptive power of community drama in the otherwise brutal life of Sing Sing jail. Colman Domingo's John, the theatre group top dog, finds himself challenged by smart, volatile newbie Eye (Clarence 'Divine Eye' Maclin), whose rage (and knife) threatens to get them shut down.

The film's grainy 16mm camerawork gives the pair's friction-filled relationship a keen intimacy. Maclin (an ex-prisoner in real life, like most of the cast) is astonishingly good, as a Hamlet-playing tough who discovers that his gangster life is just another role that trapped him. He goes toe-to-toe with Domingo in their fractious scenes with the intensity of a seasoned pro.

Domingo, alternately mellow and quietly despairing as a lifer prepping intensely for his last-chance clemency hearing alongside the group's show, is as good as ever. Leisurely pacing and a restrained style give Kwedar room to dig into how staging theatre productions brings hope and playfulness to inmates battered by predatory prison life.

Touching rather than touchy-feely, it's a high-stakes story with its fair share of fights, deaths and tensions. If it's also a tad starry-eyed about drama as a cultural cure-all, Kwedar's empathy for the life-battered inmates makes this a rare, graceful work. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT Domingo's soulful performance keeps this moving tale of jailhouse redemption gripping as well as gritty.

'How embarrassing, we're both dressed the same'

HELEN SLOAN SMPSP, JÉRÔME PRÉBOIS, CURZON, BLACK BEAR, PRIME VIDEO, VERTIGO, ENTERTAINMENT

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JACKPOT! TBC

How to make a killing...

★★★★★ **OUT 15 AUGUST** PRIME VIDEO

With a filmography including *Spy* and 2016's *Ghostbusters*, a Paul Feig movie always promises not to take itself too seriously. With over-the-top action and one-liners galore, *Jackpot!* has its tongue firmly planted in its cheek.

In the film's 2030 LA, things look much as they do today – except it's legal to murder the winner of the city's Grand Lottery in order to steal their prize before sundown. Awkwafina's (*The Farewell*, *Jumanji: The Next Level*) aspiring actor Katie Kim arrives in town wanting to turn her life around, and has no idea what she's in for when she secures the winning ticket.

Feig takes a while to fulfil the promise of chaotic action but things accelerate when John Cena's Noel arrives, crashing through the ceiling. Like a lethal golden retriever modelling himself on the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Noel vows to protect Katie for 10% of her prize money. And off the duo head, on the run with Cena beating up everyone in sight – in quite unexpected ways.

He's the film's highlight, while Awkwafina is likeable, but *Jackpot!* falters when it tries to delve too deeply into its characters – by the second half, the energy is flagging. A brief cameo from Machine Gun Kelly doesn't help and nor does giving Simu Liu (reteaming with Awkwafina after *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*) little to do, although he does nail the Bond villain look. **LAUREN MILES**

THE VERDICT John Cena's a joy to watch, but Paul Feig's latest isn't quite on the money.

This levitating experience wasn't quite what she was expecting

CLOSE TO YOU TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 30 AUGUST** CINEMAS

A family reunion comes laden with apprehension for Torontonian Sam (Elliot Page), who has not seen his relatives since transitioning. Yet a chance encounter on the train home with his old flame Katherine (Hillary Baack) gives him solace in an improvised piece that draws extensively on its star's personal experience. Director Dominic Savage's process is intensely collaborative and gave birth to the celebrated *I Am...* series. Alas, for all Page's commendable willingness to lay bare his soul, the results here feel histrionic, humourless and dramatically contrived. **NEIL SMITH**

RED ROOMS TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 6 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

A man is on trial for snuff-movie killings – but our focus is not him, or the victims: it's on a mysterious young woman who queues up to watch the proceedings in court every day. As we watch Kelly-Anne (Juliette Gariépy) return to her expensive, impersonal apartment, the intrigue builds, especially when she befriends a young woman who's obsessed with the accused. Canadian writer/director Pascal Plante's film uses language and sound more than visuals to convey its horrors, making for a distinctive and disturbing psychological thriller. **ANNA SMITH**

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO 12A

★★★★★ **OUT 30 AUGUST** CINEMAS

There have been numerous adaptations of Dumas' classic but there's still swash in the old buckle yet with this elegant, propulsive, three-hour revenge epic. Pierre Niney (*Yves Saint Laurent*) stars as the wronged 19th-century swain who assumes the titular moniker to pay back an act of betrayal. Tapping into the emotional cost of vengeance, the masks we wear and the thrill of a damn good sword fight, this is as smart as any franchise blockbuster. Playing like a heist movie with rapiers, it's a French fancy worth indulging. **JANE CROWTHER**

DUCHESS TBC

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS, DIGITAL

Neil Marshall carved out a legacy on the 00s horror scene with *Dog Soldiers* and *The Descent*, but his recent film work – notably 2019's hopeless *Hellboy* – has delivered diminishing returns. This swaggering revenge thriller follows the titular Duchess (Charlotte Kirk, also co-writing and producing) as she seeks retribution for the death of her gangster boyfriend. Marshall's horror instincts serve the gory action well, but the overbearing narration and try-hard dialogue soon grate. The overall impression is of a crude Brit flick left over from the post-*Lock, Stock* era. **JOEL HARLEY**

DEADPOOL & WOLVERINE 15

Enter the Void...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

'I am shocked. Really. This is my shocked face'

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

DEADPOOL
2016
Reynolds' passion project gave the superhero genre an anarchic shot in the arm.

LOGAN
2017
Hugh Jackman's big goodbye (or so it seemed) weighs heavily on *D&W*.

THE ADAM PROJECT
2022
Levy and Reynolds' previous movie involved twisted timelines, sci-fi action and redemptive arcs.

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There's a lot at stake in *Deadpool & Wolverine*. Not just for Wade Wilson's timeline – which finds itself on course for extinction – but also, on a meta-level, for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which has a hell of a lot riding on this one.

Following the Infinity Saga, the MCU hasn't maintained its enviable hit rate, leaving Deadpool with more than just katanas on his shoulders. That's a lot of pressure for a snarky, fourth-wall-breaking superhero outlier, who here appoints himself as the 'Marvel Jesus' of the sacred timeline. But Pool's innate irreverence turns out to be ideal for, if not a full reset, then a circuit-breaker for the franchise. At its best, *Deadpool & Wolverine* is laugh-out-loud funny, with some killer action and a ton of in-jokes, nods and cameos: basically, all you could hope for from an MCU movie at this point.

Sometime after the events of *Deadpool 2*, Wade's hung up his red-and-black suit and is earning an unsatisfying living in car sales. He's also split up from Vanessa (Morena Baccarin), having found himself stuck in a rut without a higher calling (or an invitation to join the Avengers). But as this film needs to bring Deadpool into the orbit of the 'sacred timeline' (Earth-616, the canon MCU timeline), it's not long until he's abducted by the TVA (Time Variance Authority), as introduced in the *Loki* series. Certainly, it helps if you've done your homework.

Of course, Wolverine also has a crucial part to play. Despite meeting a noble end in 2017's *Logan*, Hugh Jackman is back in his signature role, exhumed (literally, in one amusing early sequence) to help solve the problem that's going to wipe out Deadpool's timeline (aka the Fox universe, where the X-Men existed before the Disney merger brought them all under the same banner). This is a variant Wolvie, the key point of difference being that he's rocking the classic yellow-and-blue suit. But he'll feel familiar to fans of the X-movies even if he's a little gruffer, a harder drinker, and even more angst-burdened than before, for reasons that gradually become clear.

This chalk-and-cheese on-screen pairing – and, off-screen, banter buddies Jackman and Reynolds – is the key selling point, and it delivers. Reynolds has the motormouthed clowning down pat, delivering an *NSYNC-soundtracked dance number/goon battle with gusto. Credited on the screenplay again, Reynolds nabs the film's funniest lines – not everything lands, but another self-reflexive zinger is never far off. Jackman, meanwhile, invests an unexpected level of gravitas in a role that could've been a cynical exercise. That he's bringing so much to the character after so long is astonishing, and a testament to his acting (mutton) chops.

DIRECTOR Shawn Levy **STARRING** Ryan Reynolds, Hugh Jackman, Emma Corrin, Matthew Macfadyen, Rob Delaney, Morena Baccarin **SCREENPLAY** Ryan Reynolds, Rhett Reese, Paul Wernick, Zeb Wells, Shawn Levy **DISTRIBUTOR** Disney **RUNNING TIME** 128 mins

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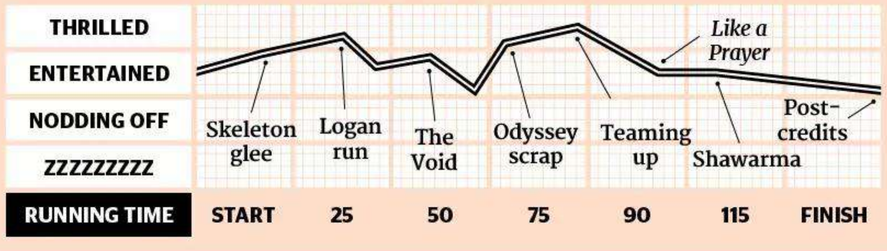

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While the odd couple are the backbone of the narrative, key new players include Emma Corrin's Cassandra Nova – the *Crown* actor making an impressive impact with their relatively brief screentime – and Matthew Macfadyen's TVA suit Mr. Paradox. Macfadyen understands the assignment, delivering another nicely pitched corporate sleazeball, albeit in a different register to *Succession*'s Tom Wambsgans. Rob Delaney's Peter again delights with fleeting appearances.

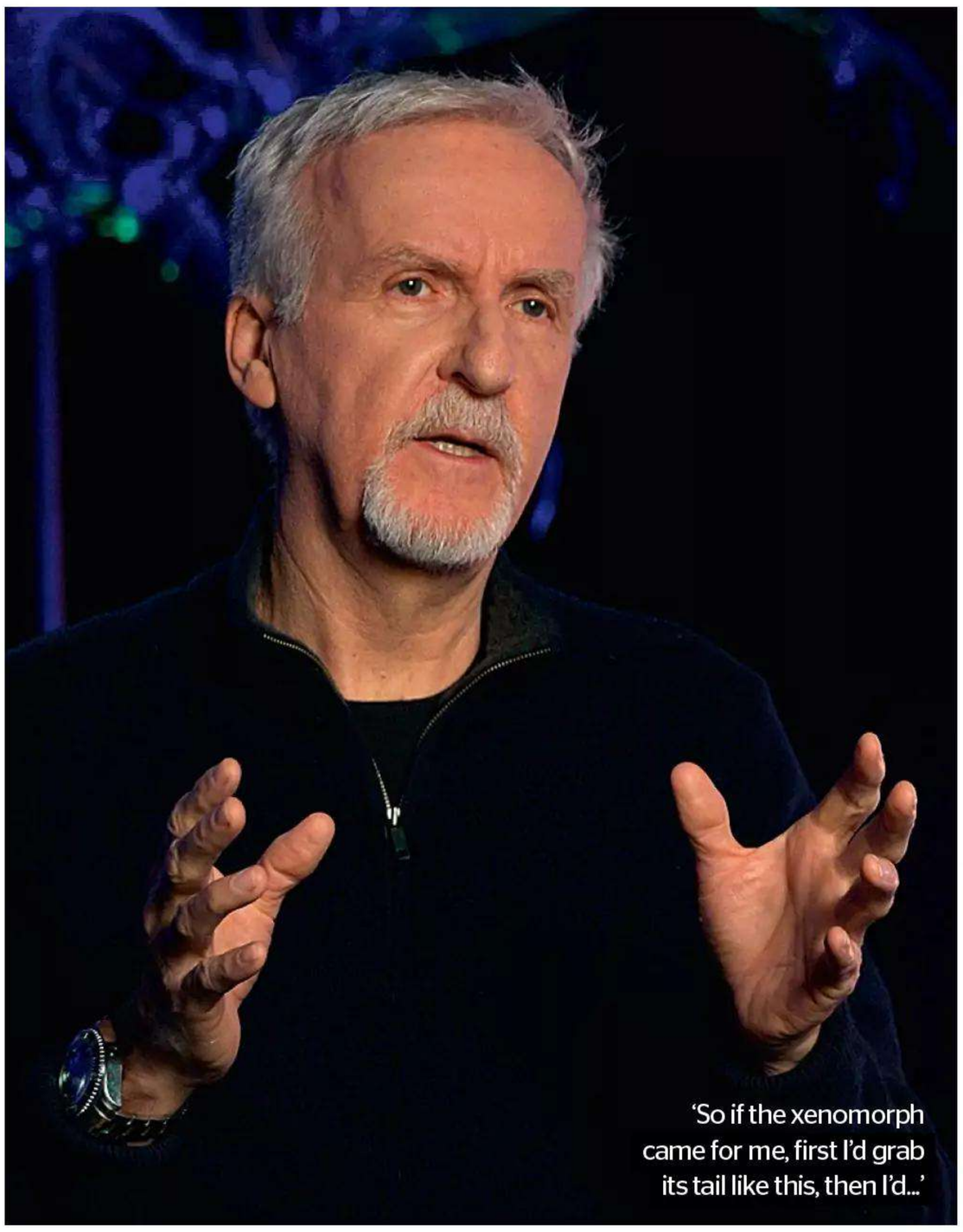
Directors rarely put a unique stamp on Marvel movies, tending to conform to the house style. New to the series, Shawn Levy has previous form with both Reynolds (*Free Guy*, *The Adam Project*) and Jackman (*Real Steel*), and he corrals all the requisite elements with slick assurance while also adding an undercurrent of heart that was absent from the previous Deadpool movies. Under the R-rated exterior, Deadpool's sweetness shines through, particularly where Dogpool is involved. There's also a sense of personal stakes, which is often absent in franchise lynchpins.

'Levy corrals all the requisite elements with slick assurance'

The action for the most part has a pleasing comic-book dynamism to it. And despite this being the inaugural Disney Deadpool (or perhaps because of that), no holds are barred in terms of cartoonishly OTT bloodletting and bone-snapping, and near-the-knuckle gags.

Despite some cameos being revealed in the deluge of pre-release trailers, other jaw-to-floor surprises here will delight even the most avid followers. If that's the biggest miracle this messiah manages, how the film will play on repeat viewings when the surprise factor is gone is debatable. And for all its brash swagger, there are punches pulled. The film stays away from a hard reboot, and reminds you more than once that MCU movies like to have their cake and eat it, too. Enough plot strands are left dangling that you almost wish the TVA had stepped in and had a tidy-up. But in the moment, it's a lot of fun squeezed into a runtime that's lean considering the amount of fan service packed in. LFG. **MATT MAYTUM**

THE VERDICT The MCU's self-appointed messiah might not execute a complete course correction, but he delivers an action-packed, gag-stuffed crowd-pleaser. Jackman is worth his weight in adamantium.



'So if the xenomorph came for me, first I'd grab its tail like this, then I'd...'

ALIENS EXPANDED TBC

The xenomorph, the merrier...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL

If you miss the peak years of DVD/BD extras, this deep dip into James Cameron's 1986 maximalist classic is for you. Even after the 2010 Anthology's MU-TH-UR-mode load, there's enough insight in Ian Nathan's 282-minute docu-dive to justify revisiting LV-426. Playing like a high-grade assemblage of disc features, it's a tribute that reiterates why *Aliens* deserves the expanded treatment.

Everyone seems to have boarded the dropship, for starters. With Cameron, Sigourney Weaver and Gale Anne Hurd leading, Jenette Goldstein, Michael Biehn, Paul Reiser, Carrie Henn, Lance Henriksen and many more (chest)burst with stories, observations and interpretations.

Kicking off with *Aliens*' sense of a 'tactile reality', contributors tease out anti-corporate, post-Vietnam and PTSD subtexts gamely. Nicely nerdy details mount, ranging from Burke's collars to the alien queen's physique. Meanwhile, the study of how Cameron thrived within the film's pre-CGI limitations upholds his tenacious ingenuity. And his rage isn't ignored, with the 'tea lady' anecdote adding amusingly intemperate colour.

Feelings pour out freely elsewhere, not least in the touching Bill Paxton nods. True, even at this somewhat unwieldy length, certain materials go undeveloped – while *Alien 3* is critiqued, Neill Blomkamp's nixed corrective sequel is neglected. But if you need reminding why we're still loving the aliens 38 years later, this top-drawer valentine arrives with its game face on. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Cameron's badass epic merits all the love in this fervent, fastidious and unapologetically fannish celebration.

ONLY THE RIVER FLOWS 15

Water way to go...

★★★★★ **OUT 16 AUGUST** CINEMAS

Adapting the novella *Mistakes by the River* by Yu Hua, writer/director Wei Shujun's procedural is a slow-burn serial-killer tale that gradually worms its way inside you. Set in the 1990s, the story follows detective inspector Ma Zhe (Zhu Yilong) as he investigates a mysterious murderer whose victims have been left strewn by a riverbank close to a village in Southern China.

Charged with solving the gruesome killing of 'Granny No 4', Ma becomes increasingly obsessed with – and disturbed by – the case. It hardly helps that things on his home front are also unstable, with his wife (Chloe Maayan) pregnant with a baby that may be born mentally disabled.

With cinematographer Chengma Zhiyuan amplifying the noir-ish vibes, *Only the River Flows* becomes increasingly dream-like and haunting in its second half. The result could sit comfortably alongside Sidney Lumet's *The Offence* and David Fincher's *Zodiac*, both films about brutal crimes that get under a cop's skin. Wei even nods to cinema, with Ma setting up office in an abandoned theatre.

Thankfully, there are some fine moments of humour to relieve the bleakness, led by the table-tennis-playing chief of police (Hou Tianlai) who favours Ma. Like 2014 Chinese noir *Black Coal, Thin Ice*, this is an increasingly warped movie that takes its audience for a rapids ride into madness. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Boldly acted and shot, this stealthy Chinese cop drama impressively plots a descent into insanity.

'Guys, I've found our tent'

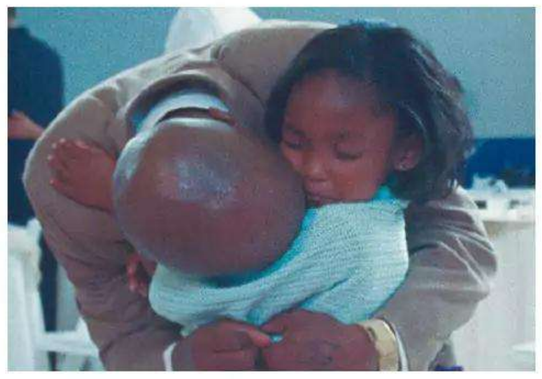
CREATORVC, PICTUREHOUSE, CONIC, NETFLIX, DAZZLER MEDIA, BULLDOG, SONY

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

PARADISE IS BURNING TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 30 AUGUST** CINEMAS

It's summertime in suburban Sweden and three sisters, aged 16, 12 and seven, have been left to fend for themselves after their mother walked out months earlier. The eldest, Laura (Bianca Delbravo), acts as a de-facto parent, but social services have started to ask questions. Written and directed by Mika Gustafson, this is an ambiguous yet vibrant portrait of female adolescence. As the title suggests, it's a film of opposites – freedom and responsibility, euphoria and sadness, rituals and spontaneity – and it's impressively acted by the young non-professional cast. **TOM DAWSON**



DAUGHTERS 12A

★★★★★ **OUT NOW**

CINEMAS, NETFLIX

Tear-jerking but thought-provoking, this lyrical, empathetic doco tracks four daughters (aged between five and 15 when filming starts) and their incarcerated fathers, before the 2019 'Date with Dad' prison dance reunites them for one precious night. Directors Angela Patton and Natalie Rae dig into the awkwardness, disappointments and broken promises of the following years, but also find a touching joy in families' slow and bumpy healing. The fatherhood group counselling revelations cut like a knife, too: 'The streets don't love us. Our kids love us.' **KATE STABLES**

NOAH'S ARK: A MUSICAL ADVENTURE U

★★★★★ **OUT 23 AUGUST** CINEMAS

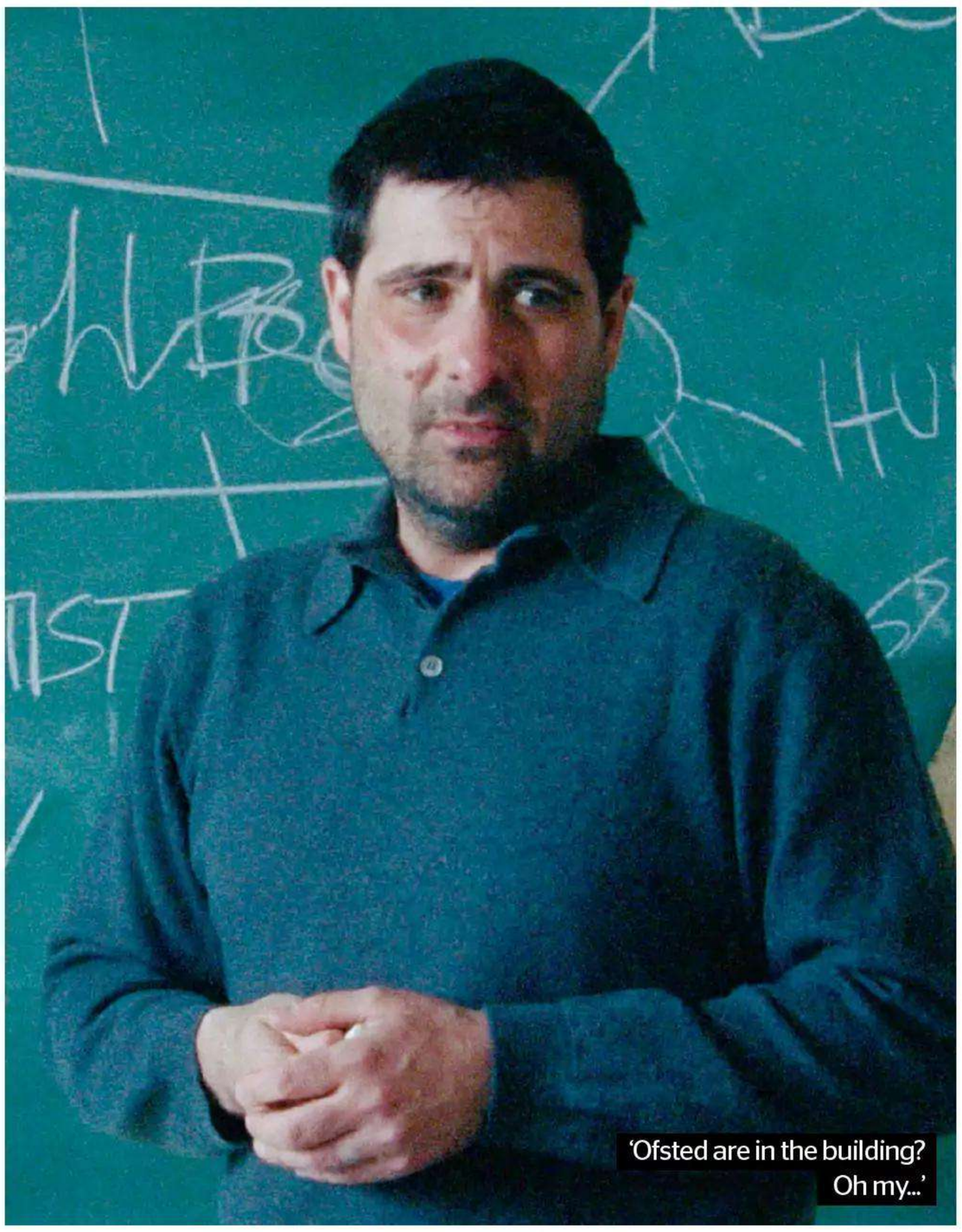
This Old Testament romp reportedly boasts one of Brazil's largest budgets for an animated film – but you may wonder where the money was spent. Following the adventures of bohemian mice Vini and Tom as they board Noah's craft, it's a musical with no standout songs, rather rudimentary animation and a pace that can feel like 40 days and 40 nights. Sporting the vocal talents of Alice Braga and Rodrigo Santoro, it's inoffensive fare that will likely only float the boats of Sunday-school fans. **JANE CROWTHER**

CADEJO BLANCO 15

★★★★★ **OUT 23 AUGUST**

CINEMAS, DIGITAL

When her sister goes missing, a young woman (Karen Martínez) infiltrates a violent gang in coastal Puerto Barrios, searching for answers. Largely centring on real-life gang members and non-professional actors, this crime thriller has lived-in realism and a sense of danger behind every bloodied nose. Writer/director Justin Lerner's script was informed by the cast, who lend the dialogue its gritty authenticity. The depiction of street-level Guatemala is both beautiful and intimidating, but the clumsily incorporated action leaves any character work in the dust. **JOEL HARLEY**



'Ofsted are in the building? Oh my...'

BETWEEN THE TEMPLES 15

Torah Torah Torah...

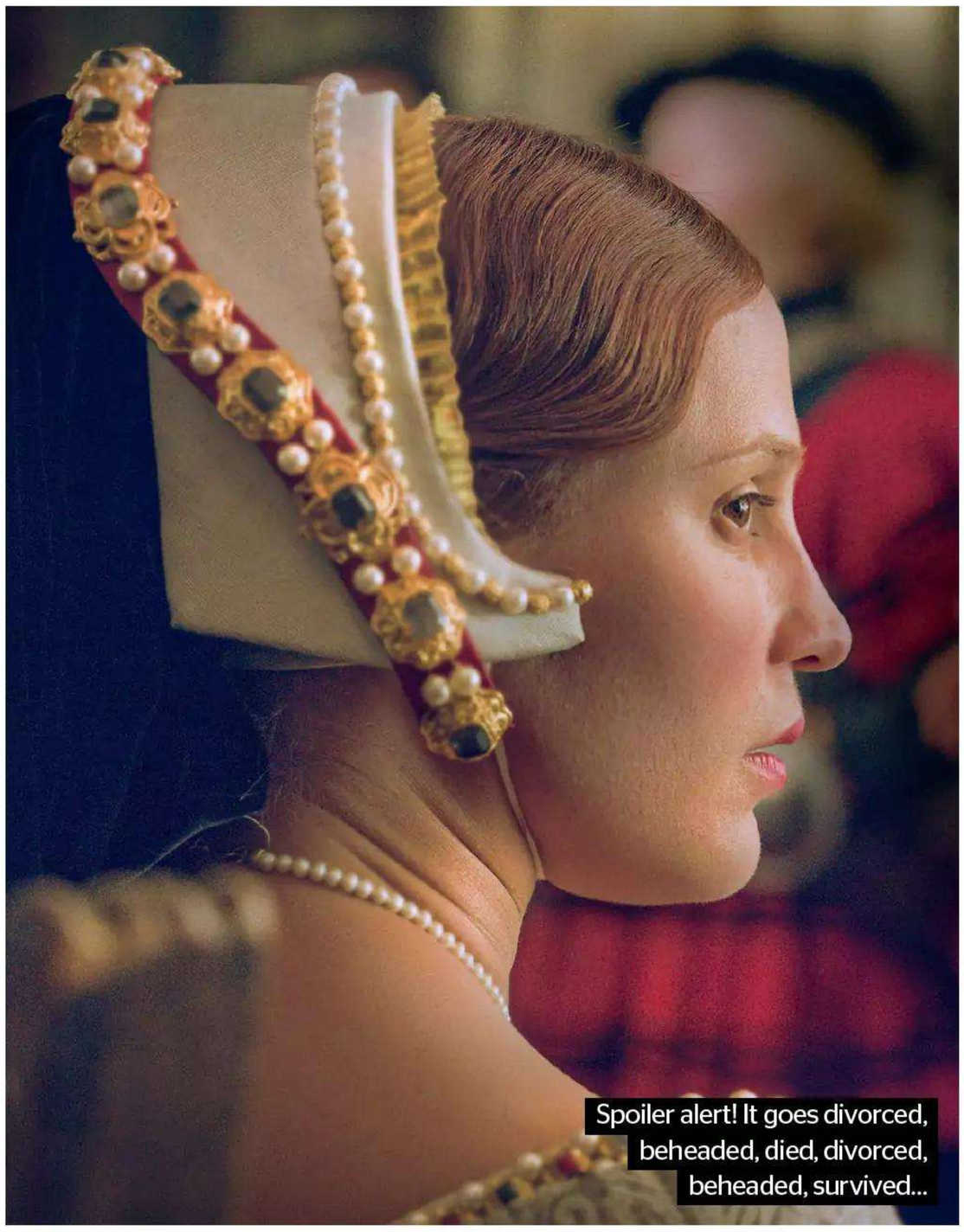
★★★★★ **OUT 23 AUGUST** CINEMAS

Age-gap romances never get old, be they 1971's *Harold and Maude* or the recent *The Idea of You*. Throw in grief and religion, though, and they can get awfully complicated, as this offbeat comedy from indie auteur Nathan Silver repeatedly and amusingly demonstrates.

Having lost both his wife and his ability to sing, cantor Ben Gottlieb (Jason Schwartzman) is in a slump no amount of drunken brawling and half-hearted suicide attempts can shake him out of. Until, that is, his former music teacher Carla (Carol Kane) re-enters his life, determined – at the age of 70-something – to have the bat mitzvah she missed out on as a child. Ben agrees to become her tutor, convincing himself along the way that she's the woman of his dreams. How will Ben's two moms (Caroline Aaron and Dolly De Leon) and Carla's adult son (Matthew Shear) react when he makes his feelings known?

With an eye for cultural specifics Topol's Tevye would be proud of, Silver entertainingly steers us through the pitfalls of Jewish dating, the laws of kosher dining and the challenges of reading Hebrew from the Torah. Yet his greatest achievement is making Ben's affection for Carla seem honest, wholesome and heartfelt, regardless of how many societal niceties and generational no-nos it defiantly flies in the face of. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT A highly appealing romcom that boasts endearing performances from Jason Schwartzman and the evergreen Carol Kane.


Spoiler alert! It goes divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived...

FIREBRAND 15

Rising Parr...

★★★★★ **OUT 6 SEPTEMBER** CINEMAS

Brazilian director Karim Aïnouz delivers a grungy take on Katherine Parr, the sixth and final wife of King Henry VIII, in this occasionally taut yet sometimes over-egged period drama. With Henrietta and Jessica Ashworth freely adapting Elizabeth Fremantle's novel, *Queen's Gambit*, Alicia Vikander is cast as the spouse who is seen as a threat to the survival of the Tudor monarch (Jude Law), and who eventually outlives him.

Katherine is suspected of holding radical views, as shown here by her covert friendship with Protestant heretic Anne Askew (Erin Doherty). When Henry returns from France with debilitating ulcers and sores up his legs, he becomes increasingly paranoid as his health declines. Playing the ultimate toxic male, Law has a field day as the monstrous king, offering up a suitably larger-than-life performance next to Vikander's inward-looking turn. Also featuring Simon Russell Beale and Eddie Marsan as influential political figures, *Firebrand* scores with its smart portrayal of the machinations of courtly intrigue.

Unfortunately, the script plays so fast and loose with history – fabricated pregnancies and other creative choices – that it rather undercuts the piece's power and potential. But, thanks to Helen Scott's meticulous production design, *Firebrand* is still captivating to watch. It shows Tudor England for all its grotesqueness, a world so savage and beastly you can practically smell the stench. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Upended by its revisionist approach to history, but Law and Vikander still rule this handsome drama.

A STORY OF BONES 12A

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

On the island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic, the (empty) burial site of Napoleon is revered, attracting tourist dollars. If only the remains of the thousands of formerly enslaved Africans were treated with such respect… Joseph Curran and Dominic Aubrey de Vere's sorrowful documentary unearths the island's strategic positioning as part of the British Empire and the transatlantic slave trade, and how the authorities acted disgracefully when the building of an airport, in 2006, turned up a mass grave. 'Black lives *don't* matter,' laments environmental officer Annina van Neel. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

OZI: VOICE OF THE FOREST PG

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

It's never too early for kids to learn about deforestation, greenwashing and the impact of palm-oil production – and if it takes a cartoon orangutan to make the lesson palatable, so be it. There isn't much sophistication to be found in this tale of an ape separated from her parents who sets out to unveil what happened to their habitat. Yet making Ozi a social-media influencer is a droll touch, while the classy voice cast includes Amandla Stenberg, Laura Dern, Djimon Hounsou and – in his final film role, playing an albino crocodile – Donald Sutherland. **NEIL SMITH**

MANDOOB (AKA NIGHT COURIER) 15

★★★★★ **OUT 30 AUGUST** CINEMAS

The lambent glow of the city at night lures you into debut director Ali Kalthami's hypnotic drama, a hit in Saudi Arabia. Riffing on the title's double meaning – night courier/someone who is mourned – the darkly comic action centres on the newly unemployed Fahad (Mohamad Aldokhei). Desperate to help his ailing father, he takes precarious work delivering bootleg booze to the rich. While Aldokhei brings warmth, Kalthami's *Drive*-style direction dazzles: slowly but stylishly, Fahad's nocturnal journeys take on the rain-slicked gleam of fatalist tragi-noir. **KEVIN HARLEY**

WIDOW CLICQUOT 15

★★★★★ **OUT 23 AUGUST** CINEMAS

This lavish biopic celebrates 18th-century winemaker Barbe-Nicole Ponsardin Clicquot, founder of the champagne brand that bears her name. Producer/star Haley Bennett ferments a potent brand of melancholy in the title role, mourning the loss of husband François (Tom Sturridge) while crafting batches of bubbly. Helmer Thomas Napper (*Jawbone*) worked on Joe Wright's *Atonement* and *Pride & Prejudice*, and this is of similar vintage – part period bodice-ripper, part tragic romance. Non-linear storytelling prevents the tale from losing its fizz as it shifts between notes of joy and sorrow. **JOEL HARLEY**

BLUE FINCH, KALEIDOSCOPE, METFILM, METIS FILMS, MUNRO FILMS, SIGNATURE, TRINITY CINEASIA, TULL STORIES, UNIVERSAL/DOGWOOF, VERTIGO

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GRACIE AND PEDRO: MISSION IMPOSSIBLE PG

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

If you've ever panicked about the possibility of losing a pet, then this family animation may prove surprisingly gripping. Dog Gracie (voiced by Claire Alan) and cat Pedro (Cory Doran) go missing while their owners are moving house, ending up on a vaguely eventful journey while the kids back home stage a viral campaign to locate them. It's mildly amusing in parts, and has an impressively starry supporting voice cast (Bill Nighy, Susan Sarandon, Danny Trejo, Alicia Silverstone…). Definitely one for the kids, but not too much of a chore for grown-ups. **ANNA SMITH**

HOSTILE DIMENSIONS 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 26 AUGUST** DIGITAL

Scottish writer/director Graham Hughes follows his unnerving 2019 feature *Death of a Vlogger* with another lo-fi mockumentary, featuring the same cast and crew. In *Hostile Dimensions*, doc-makers Sam and Ash (Annabel Logan, Joma West) investigate a free-standing door discovered in a derelict building, a seeming portal to… what? The subconscious? Hallucinations? Or perhaps the multiverse? The acting wobbles more than the DIY monsters, but there are ideas aplenty and the locations (all within three hours of Glasgow) lend moments of surprising scale. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE MOUNTAIN WITHIN ME 12A

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 23 AUGUST** CINEMAS

Polly Steele's triumph-of-the-human-spirit documentary follows Ed Jackson, a former professional rugby union player who was paralysed from the shoulders down after a swimming accident. Defying the medics, Jackson learnt to walk again and more: here, Steele depicts his remarkable attempts to scale Snowdonia, the Alps and the Himalayas. But while Jackson's grit proves staggering, the film surprisingly lacks the drama required to hit its peak – even shots of mountain ranges don't quite convey the majesty of Mother Nature. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

HARD MILES 12

★★★☆☆ **OUT 2 SEPTEMBER**

DIGITAL

Inspired by a true story, R.J. Daniel Hanna's sports drama tracks social worker Greg Townsend (Matthew Modine) as he leads a cycling team of juvenile offenders on a 762-mile ride to the Grand Canyon. The redemptive terrain is familiar but softly pedalled to avoid corny sentiment, and the committed cast give unshowy performances. Meanwhile, there's a sprinkling of politics to go with the pep talks and peloton – the correctional school's funding is about to be cut – and the mountainous roads make for a slideshow of stunning vistas. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

Lost and hound: *Black Dog* deals with issues such as loneliness

BLACK DOG 12A

District canine…

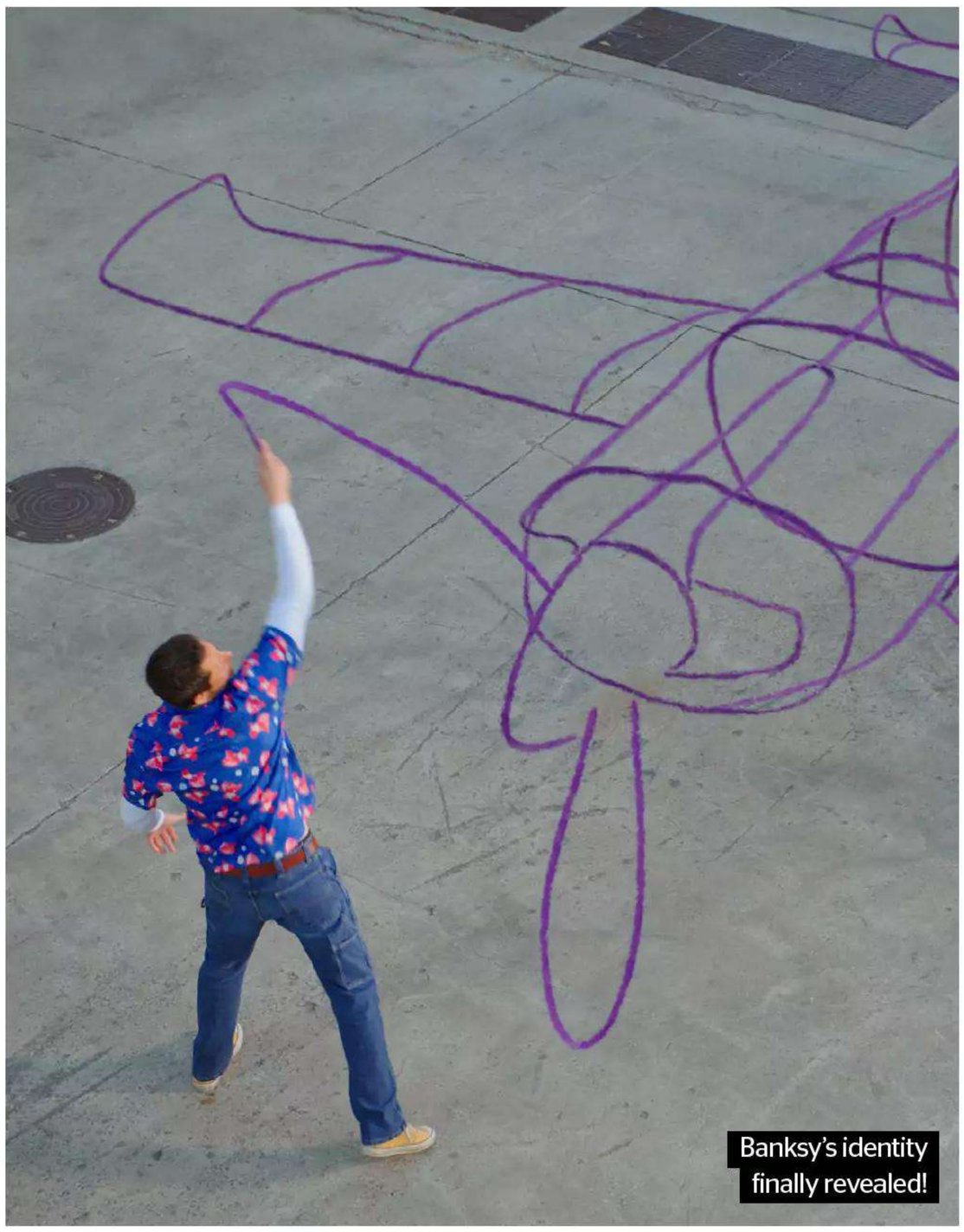
★★★★☆ **OUT 30 AUGUST** CINEMAS

The man-and-his-mangy-mutt movie is clipped of Hollywood sentiment in Chinese director Guan Hu's absorbing drama, as taciturn Lang (Eddie Peng) is released from prison and returns to his sandblasted home town on the edge of the Gobi desert in north-west China. Needing money, he joins in the hunt for the many stray hounds roaming the streets, a clean-up operation mounted in readiness for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. There's bonus cash for anyone who captures the black whippet thought to have rabies.

Though tracking the familiar arc of two lonely, misunderstood souls learning to trust and love, Guan's film favours social realism over sappiness, surrounding Lang with a father who's drinking himself to death and a rundown town being bulldozed. A forlorn local zoo is made up of empty cages and malnourished beasts. Weizhe Gao's parched widescreen images turn the desolate streets, vast plains and distant, forbidding mountains into alien landscapes, and the sweeping shots of hundreds of running hounds are apocalyptic.

In the pantheon of dog movies, *Black Dog* is more *White God*, *Bombón: El Perro* or *Umberto D.* than *Marley & Me*. It won the Un Certain Regard competition at this year's Cannes, and – even more deservedly – its Jack Russell-greyhound cross star Xin proved best in show to nab the Palm Dog. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT A tough but feel-good story of redemption with nods to westerns and noirs. Good dog!



HAROLD AND THE PURPLE CRAYON PG

Drawn to be mildly entertaining...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Loosely adapting the picture book of the same name, *Harold and the Purple Crayon* opens with an animated sequence featuring the baby whose scribblings come to life. When he grows up and his narrator's voice goes quiet, a journey to the real world ensues, in which Harold (in the form of Zachary Levi) and his pals Moose (Lil Rel Howery) and Porcupine (Tanya Reynolds) become humans.

Anything Harold draws with his magic crayon becomes real in our world, too, to the delight of new-found young friend Mel (Benjamin Bottani). It's a fun idea that director Carlos Saldanha (various Ice Ages) makes solid use of. Plenty of elements feel familiar – Levi's man-child-out-of-water recalls *Shazam!* and *Big*, while Zooey Deschanel's casting as department-store worker and single mum Terry reinforces *Elf* parallels. But it's a big-hearted and slick confection that entertains without outstaying its welcome, and Saldanha delivers its uncomplicated messages without too much sentimentality.

Squarely aimed at younger audiences, the focus on imaginative play encourages you to go a little easy on the occasionally substandard CGI. A side plot with a lost Porcupine also adds little. But Jemaine Clement enlivens things as a frustrated would-be fantasy author, and the stakes are refreshingly low-key. Throw in some amusing set pieces and it's easy-to-enjoy fun, especially if you're of crayon-using age. **MATT MAYTUM**

THE VERDICT Not a film you'll wax lyrical about, but there's enough chaotic, kid-friendly fun here to entertain.

BABES 15

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

BFFs in New York since childhood, yoga teacher Eden (Ilana Glazer) and dentist Dawn (Michelle Buteau) find their friendship severely tested when the latter gives birth to a second child and the former becomes pregnant after a one-night stand. Scripted by Glazer herself and Josh Rabinowitz, and directed by Pamela Adlon, *Babes* doesn't tiptoe around the physical realities of pregnancy, with its jokes about discharging breast milk and vaginal secretions. The material feels better suited to a sitcom format, but the two female leads make for credible best friends. **TOM DAWSON**

HOLLYWOODGATE 12A

★★★★★ **OUT 16 AUGUST** CINEMAS

Ibrahim Nash'at's rigorous, year-spanning documentary follows the Taliban regime after US military forces left Afghanistan in August 2021. Two main individuals emerge: newly assigned air-force commander Malawi Mansour and Mukhtar, an ambitious lieutenant looking to ascend the ranks. A worthy companion piece to Matthew Heineman's 2022 doc *Retrograde*, *Hollywoodgate*'s footage astounds as Taliban forces take over an ex-CIA base in Kabul, with abandoned military hardware everywhere you look. Painting a bleak picture of a country in turmoil, this is shocking stuff. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

CASH OUT 15

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DIGITAL

John Travolta's made some VOD clangers these past few years, so this competent heist thriller, featuring a peppy turn from the 70-year-old actor, comes as something of a relief. He plays master thief Mason Goddard, trapped with his crew in a bank, forced to negotiate with an FBI agent (Kristin Davis) who happens to be an ex-lover who double-crossed him. Director Randall Emmett (who faced allegations of abuse in 2022, and is here credited under his pseudonym Ives) outdoes Michael Bay's *Ambulance* with the drone shots, but the most potent source of energy is JT. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

BEFORE DAWN 15

★★★★★ **OUT 2 SEPTEMBER**

DVD, BD, DIGITAL

Despite drawing on the real diaries of WW1 Anzac troops on the Somme, this solid, sentimental story of naive Aussie farm boys thrown into the mud and slaughter of trench warfare feels like something we've often seen before. Lacking a *Gallipoli*-level big-battle budget, first-time director/co-writer Jordon Prince-Wright tracks sniper hero Jim (a too-gentle Levi Miller) through nerve-shredding raiding parties and deafening shelling, focusing on chin-up camaraderie rather than his growing disillusionment. The dialogue is stiffer than an officer's upper lip. **KATE STABLES**

101 FILMS, APPLE, CURZON, KALEIDOSCOPE, SONY, UNIVERSAL, WARNER BROS.

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TWISTERS 12A

Riders on the storm...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Only *Independence Day* took more at the box office than *Twister* in 1996, and yet it's taken 28 years to work up a second wind. Thankfully, *Twisters* is worth the wait, its swirl of large-scale spectacle, likeable characters and heartfelt sentiment excusing a plot that's just a washing line on which to peg set pieces.

More reboot than sequel, *Twisters* focuses on Kate (Daisy Edgar-Jones), a former storm-chaser now tracking weather patterns in New York five years after a tornado catastrophe. Then her old friend Javi (Anthony Ramos) re-enters her life, pleading that she join his team to face the once-in-a-generation batch of twisters set to raze Oklahoma. As they race other chasers, their chief rival is cocky 'tornado wrangler' Tyler Owens (Glen Powell), rocking a cowboy-hat-and-wet-white-T look for his YouTube subscribers.

Director Lee Isaac Chung handles the character beats with grace, retaining some of the heart and detail he brought to indie charmer *Minari* (2020). He also has a feel for rural landscapes and an understanding of communities, taking the screen time to sift through the devastation wrought by the power of Mother Nature.

But if you want to know about the wind, *Twisters* outstrips Jan de Bont's original blustery blockbuster for scale while keeping things shudderingly immersive. You'll emerge bruised and buffeted, and likely hoping it's not another 28 years until we twist again. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT Powell's ascent continues in a film that does pretty much all you could want from a Twister movie.

'You wanna decent sequel? Pop an S on the end – job done!'

Matt Damon stars as Rory, a man under pressure

THE INSTIGATORS 15

The Boston manglers...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** APPLE TV+

Years after *The Bourne Identity*, director Doug Liman and star Matt Damon reunite for this well-cast and crafty Boston-set crime caper. Damon plays Rory, a man at his wits' end, as he tells his therapist (Hong Chau). Rory needs $32,480 for reasons that will become clear, and he plans to get it by joining a heist run by Michael Stuhlbarg and Alfred Molina's small-time crooks.

A stand-off goes wrong as the robbery takes place during the local elections, but worse is to come after Rory and his associate Cobby (Casey Affleck) steal a bracelet belonging to the mayor (Ron Perlman), who desperately wants it back. Soon, everyone from Paul Walter Hauser's thug to Ving Rhames' cop is in pursuit.

Scripted with panache by Affleck and Chuck MacLean, the film nods towards Trump as Perlman's crooked mayor refuses to concede the election. But this is just an added layer to Liman's intoxicating blend of comedy and action, something he's done so well before in films such as *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* and *American Made*.

From hair-raising gas explosions to car chases cut to Petula Clark's *Downtown* and riots scored to House of Pain's *Jump Around*, there's a visceral quality to *The Instigators*, although it comes secondary to the character-building and down-at-heel comedy. With its blue-collar world proving an ideal backdrop, the result is a heap of fun. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Sharply observed and always thrilling, with a top-notch cast and a pleasing old-school vibe, *The Instigators* is tremendously entertaining.

The soft-play tunnel still had no sign of an end

CORALINE PG

Jeepers peepers...

2009 ★★★★★ **OUT 15 AUGUST** CINEMAS

In 2009, reviewers of Henry Selick's stop-motion Neil Gaiman adaptation tended to emphasise the optical furnishings. No, not the buttons – the 3D glasses viewers needed to wear. Well, never mind the stereoscopics: 15 years and innumerable Halloween-cosplay homages later, *Coraline*'s darkly delightful pleasures remain multi-dimensional, whichever 'D' you watch it in.

It's easy to see why kids related to the agreeably wayward Coraline (voiced by Dakota Fanning), a smart, stroppy and terminally bored tween girl desperate to get her parents' attention. But Mum (Teri Hatcher) and Dad (John Hodgman) are busy, always, so she turns to a mirror world where everything seems picture-perfect – until its resident Other Mother and Father aim needles, threads and buttons at her peepers...

Marshalling the creepy/cautionary currents of classic children's fiction, Selick also summons horror motifs playfully. The alt-realm evokes *The Stepford Wives* for kids, with added creepy-crawlies. Meanwhile, Selick's weird and wondrous world-building bustles with expressively carnivalesque colours and contrasts, conveying the tale's darker currents in shape-shifting flurries of fluid detail and dazzle.

True, the plotting frays at the edges and the addition of cyclist/saviour Wybie (Robert Bailey Jr.) to Gaiman's narrative feels awkward. But with Bruno Coulais' haunted score ushering it ever onwards, Selick's stop-mo benchmark remains a feast for the senses. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT Treat your inner child's optics to some surreal scares with Selick's lushly mounted fable. 'So sharp...'

ORCA THE KILLER WHALE 12

1977 ★★★☆☆ **OUT 2 SEPTEMBER**

DVD, BD, 4K UHD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆ Featurette, Art cards

Eager to follow *Jaws*' success, wily producer Dino De Laurentiis hired director Michael Anderson (*The Dam Busters*) to make an action drama that pits Richard Harris' salty sea cap'n against a killer whale. But this is less Spielberg and more aquatic *Death Wish*, the marine monster becoming our hero as it avenges the killing of its pregnant mate. This 4K release is supported by a half-hour interview with French filmmaker Philippe Guedj, who stresses the tone of guilt and regret: '*Orca* is sadness.' **JAMIE GRAHAM**

HEAVENLY PURSUITS 15

1986 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★☆☆☆

Featurette, Short films, Booklet

A decidedly atheist teacher (Tom Conti) at a Glasgow Catholic school finds himself associated with a series of apparently miraculous events in this quirky comic drama from writer/director Charles Gormley. There are clear hints of Bill Forsyth in the film's humour and the naturalism of its juvenile performances, while Conti and Helen Mirren make for engaging leads. If only the story didn't essentially sideline its intriguing theological underpinnings in favour of a glib romantic finale. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

SOLDIER BLUE 18

1970 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, 4K UHD, DIGITAL

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

Commentary, Featurette

Inspired by the horrific 1864 Sand Creek massacre, but fired by more recent American atrocities in the Vietnam War, Ralph Nelson's (*Lilies of the Field*) brutal revisionist western (here newly restored) still shocks half a century on. Based on a novel by T.V. Olsen, it follows a stranded young woman (Candice Bergen) and soldier (Peter Strauss) through a divided Colorado. While their burgeoning romance grates, and the pace flags in the middle, the climactic scenes of violence will sear your memory for a good long while. **MATT GLASBY**

BLOW OUT 18

1981 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★☆

Feature film, Featurettes, Stills, Essay

Brian De Palma's riff on Antonioni's *Blow-Up* and Coppola's *The Conversation* is one of his finest films, pitching sound-effects man Jack Terry (John Travolta) into a political conspiracy when he accidentally records a fatal car accident. A masterpiece of suspense, set-pieces and despair, it gets another jolt from this director-approved 4K restoration, bringing crystal clarity to its deconstruction of both movies and the post-Watergate climate. Pick of the extras is De Palma's feature debut *Murder à la Mod* (1968). **JAMIE GRAHAM**

ARROW, UNIVERSAL, STUDIOCANAL, BFI, SPIRIT/CRITERION

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS 18

Lecter theatre...

1991 ★★★★★ **OUT 26 AUGUST** BD, 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Documentary, Featurettes, Trivia track, Deleted scenes, Outtakes, Gallery, Booklet, Poster, Art cards

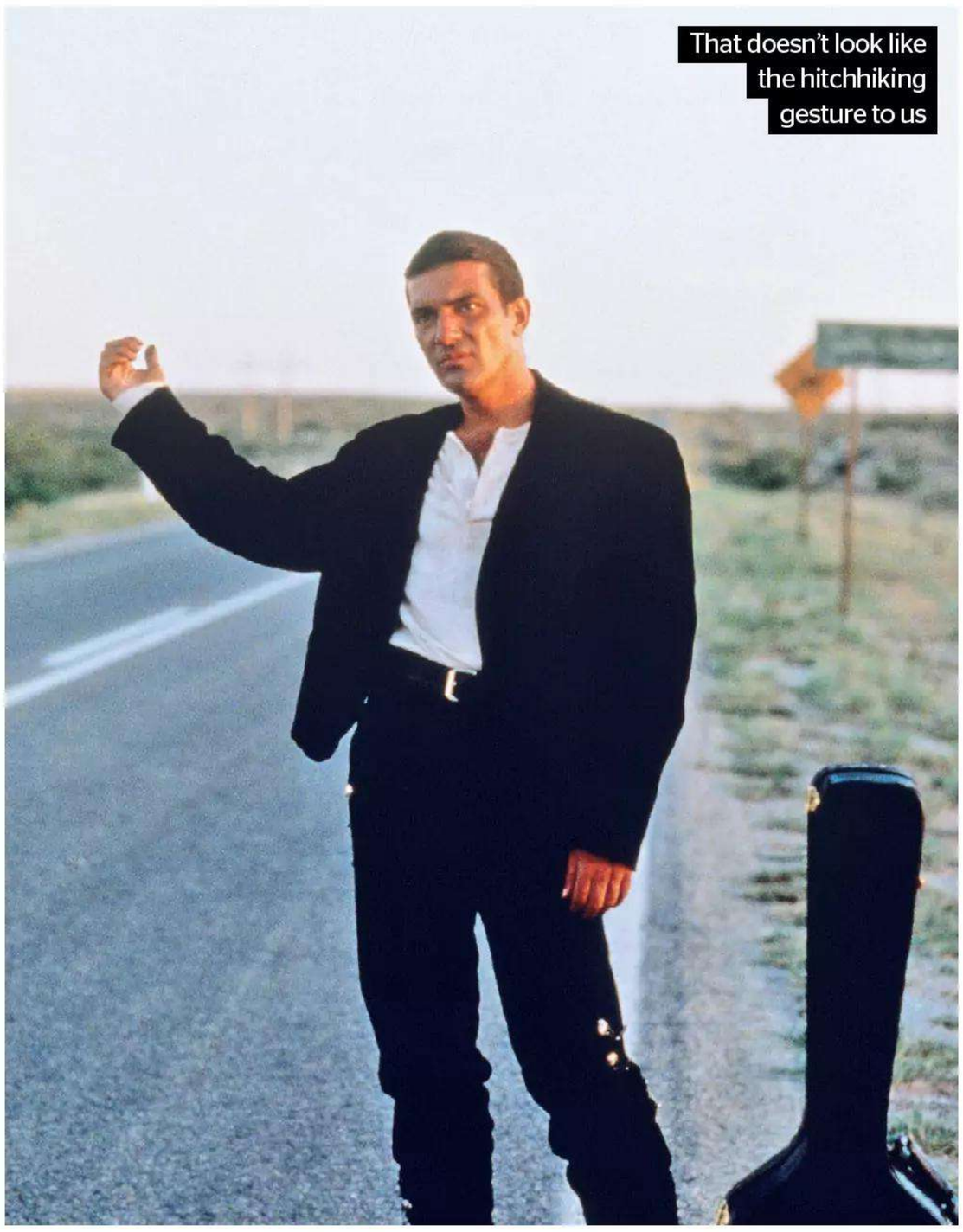
He's behind you...

From Hans Beckert (Fritz Lang's *M*) to Norman Bates, serial killers were hardly thin on the cinematic ground before *The Silence of the Lambs*. However, their place in popular culture was changed forever in its aftermath; director Jonathan Demme's Oscar-winning box-office smash drove a wider fascination with serial killers and forensic criminology that still shows no sign of waning.

Deftly adapted by scripter Ted Tally from Thomas Harris' thriller, Demme's film employs a police-procedural setup as the bedrock for a Grand Guignol-infused slice of Gothic horror. Bridging these two distinct narrative modes is the psychological conflict between Jodie Foster's FBI trainee Clarice Starling and Anthony Hopkins' cannibal Hannibal Lecter, the latter holding the key to cracking the 'Buffalo Bill' murder case.

Mention of Buffalo Bill, of course, brings us to the film's most contentious aspect. While some effort is made to establish that Bill (Ted Levine) is not 'transsexual', you can still see why members of a marginalised group would view the killer's depiction as troubling. Kudos, then, to Arrow for the insightful new commentary by queer-film historian Elizabeth Purchell and trans-film historian Caden Mark Gardner included among the comprehensive array of extras. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE VERDICT The ultimate modern serial-killer movie gets a definitive disc release. Pour yourself a nice chianti and enjoy...


That doesn't look like the hitchhiking gesture to us

THE MEXICO TRILOGY 18

Let's (press) play...

1992-2003 ★★★★½ **OUT 26 AUGUST** 4K UHD AND BD

EXTRAS ★★★★½ Commentaries, Featurettes, Poster, Booklet

This handsome, extras-packed box set offers a fine reminder of what a gutsy, gung-ho filmmaker Robert Rodriguez is. *El Mariachi* (1992) is a case in point. The opening salvo in Rodriguez's trio of gunslinging Mex-westerns, it showcases a writer/director defying the odds. Legendarily produced for just over $7,000, it announced Rodriguez as a genre-savvy super-stylist who knew how to make the most of limited means. Starring Carlos Gallardo in the title role, a guitar player with dreams of being a Mariachi, this tale of mistaken identity has a raw, rough and seductive edge to it.

Following the film with *Desperado* (1995), the best of the trilogy, the director recast his lead, bringing in Antonio Banderas as well as Salma Hayek. Studded with cameos (Buscemi, Tarantino), this rat-a-tat-tat tale is bigger, bolder and braver than its predecessor. As El Mariachi seeks revenge on Joaquim de Almeida's drug lord, the film zings from one slickly edited shoot-out to another.

Rodriguez doesn't quite recapture the earlier magic in 2003's *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, despite the added star power of Johnny Depp as a CIA agent who recruits Banderas to kill a corrupt general. But this playful threequel is still an entertaining way to cap the bullet ballet. Plentiful extras (some old, many new), though *Desperado* (also available separately) is the set's sole 4K transfer. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT A three-part lesson in how to make sharp, crowd-pleasing bangers, this is Rodriguez at his most bravura.

HEATHERS 15

School for scandal...

1988 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** 4K UHD
EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentary, Featurettes, Short film, Booklet

Doing for high-school comedies what Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* did for sci-fi actioners, *Heathers* serves up a twisted reflection of the sweet-natured John Hughes teen movies that scored big at the box office in the 1980s. Famously, Michael Lehmann's film also prompted Winona Ryder's then-agent to get down on her hands and knees and beg the young actor not to take the lead role, reckoning it would ruin her career and prevent her ever working again.

To be fair, it's not hard to see why the film gave some in the industry cause for concern. Written in response to US media coverage of a recent spate of teen suicides, this wickedly dark satire about a popular high-schooler (Ryder) falling for a rebellious bad boy (Christian Slater) and embarking on a series of deadly revenge pranks ('Dear diary, my teen angst bullshit has a body count') can still be pretty shocking – arguably even more so in today's post-Columbine world. But that doesn't stop *Heathers* from also being smarter, funnier and more emotionally authentic than most of its ilk.

If this 4K UHD isn't exactly a huge visual upgrade on Arrow's 2018 Blu-ray release, the label has at least ported across its full suite of extensive extras from that disc, including Lehmann's commentary and his student short titled, ahem, *The Beaver Gets a Boner*. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

THE VERDICT Not the most essential upgrade, but any excuse to revisit this deliciously dark comedy is fine with us.

FILMS BY J. LEE THOMPSON PG/12

1954/55 **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, DIGITAL (SEPARATELY)
EXTRAS ★★★★★
Featurettes, Stills galleries

Two female-centred British 'social problem' melodramas from the director of the original *Cape Fear*. Based on Joan Henry's (Thompson's second wife) autobiography and starring Diana Dors, *The Weak and the Wicked* (★★★) charts the experiences of various women in England's penal system. While, set in a 30s East End slum, the studio-bound *No Trees in the Street* (★★) struggles to transcend its theatrical origins, despite turns from Sylvia Syms and Herbert Lom. **TOM DAWSON**

NIGHT OF THE EAGLE 12

1962 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, DIGITAL
EXTRAS ★★★★★
Commentary, Featurettes, Alt opening, Stills gallery, Art cards

Unfairly overlooked for many years, Sidney Hayers' British horror (aka *Burn, Witch, Burn*) is pure class. Based on the 1943 novel *Conjure Wife* by Fritz Leiber, it stars Peter Wyngarde as an arrogant university professor whose wife (Janet Blair) has been secretly helping his career with Jamaican witchcraft. But what will happen if she stops? The leads are great value, the story moves at a clip, and Reginald Wyer's gorgeous cinematography suggests an ever-present, lurking evil. **MATT GLASBY**

LE SAMOURAÏ 12

1967 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** 4K UHD
EXTRAS ★★★★★
Documentary, Featurettes, Essay

An influence on *Taxi Driver* (and, indeed, all of Paul Schrader's despairing visions of 'God's lonely man', plus Jarmusch, Fincher and many more), Jean-Pierre Melville's ice-cool noir sees hitman-for-hire Jef Costello (Alain Delon) pursued by cops and contractors alike after he's seen exiting an execution. Composed of precision-tooled set pieces shot in muted colours, Melville's mix of action and alienation is thrillingly austere – and now in pristine 4K. John Woo cites it as his favourite film and offers an appreciation among the extras. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE MUSIC LOVERS 15

1971 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** BD
EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentary, Featurettes, Short films, Gallery, Booklet

Released in the same year as Ken Russell's other masterpiece *The Devils*, this portrait of tortured Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky serves up a similarly feverish whirlwind of self-destructive mania, repressed desires and erotic energy. In doing so it arguably comes closer than any other film to capturing what it is like to be swept up by a piece of music, confirming Alexander Verney-Elliott's assertion that his late father Russell 'was the greatest director in the world at being able to marry image with music'. **ANTON VAN BEEK**

ARROW, STUDIOCANAL, SPIRIT/CRITERION, BFI, MGM/PARK CIRCUS

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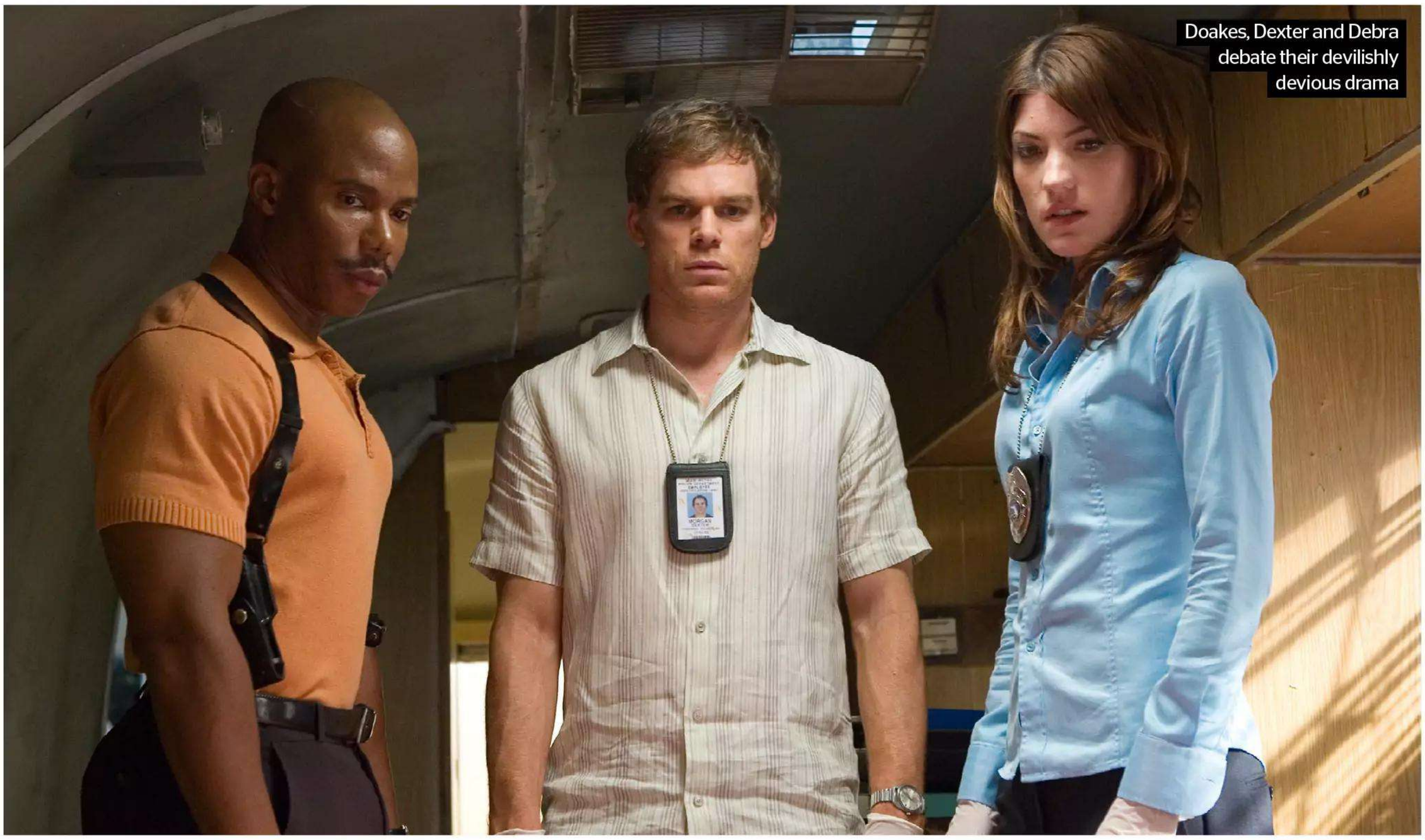

Doakes, Dexter and Debra debate their devilishly devious drama

CLASSIC TV

DEXTER

Going in for the kill(ers)...

2006-13 & 2021-22 DVD, BD, DIGITAL, NETFLIX, PARAMOUNT+

What do we talk about when we talk about bad endings to great television shows? *Game of Thrones*, *Lost*, *How I Met Your Mother*... But one of the most notorious flubbed finales of all time belongs to Showtime's *Dexter*, whose ending was so hated they had to do it all over again for miniseries revival *New Blood*.

Dexter's two controversial endings overshadow what was, in its prime, revolutionary television. An adaptation of the novel *Darkly Dreaming Dexter* (2004) by Jeff Lindsay, it took a serial killer for a protagonist – and asked viewers to root for him. An impish Michael C. Hall slipped on a convivial smile to play Dexter Morgan: Miami Metro Police Department's blood-spatter analyst by day, murderer by night.

Duplicitous Dexter initially sets his sights on criminals who fall through the gaps in the justice system, sneaking his victims away to perform bloody justice on the killer's table; basically, he's the Punisher in a pastel shirt. Mild-mannered girlfriend Rita (Julie Benz) and foul-mouthed cop sister Debra (Jennifer Carpenter) are oblivious, as are his comically inept police colleagues. All, that is, except for the dogged Sergeant James Doakes (a scene-stealing Erik King), who senses that something's not quite right with dear Dexter...

Showtime abandoned Lindsay's books after the first season's Ice Truck Killer arc, broadening the show's horizons to include fan-favourite characters like Miguel Prado (Jimmy Smits), Frank Lundy (Keith Carradine) and John Lithgow's deranged Trinity Killer (see right). There was a dip in quality after the confident, status-quo-shattering fourth season – widely acknowledged as the show's best – but *Dexter* still captivated, introducing the vengeful Lumen Pierce (Julia Stiles) and the formidable Doomsday Killer (Colin Hanks). Later arcs saw Dexter grappling with grief, fatherhood and religion, his carefully ordered life growing more complicated with each new person he let in.

Was Dexter always destined to become a killer, or was he made that way by the code implemented by his father (James Remar, first seen in flashbacks, later as the embodiment of Dexter's conscience)? The series rejected the protagonist's claim to be an emotionless monster, suggesting that he had become a force of nurture, rather than nature. Increasingly ludicrous plot developments may have overshadowed the lightness of touch *Dexter* once mastered, but the series-long story of a fiend finding his humanity – and ultimately being doomed by it – is a deeply rewarding one. **JOEL HARLEY**

SHOWTIME

MVP

JOHN LITHGOW
AS ARTHUR MITCHELL

With Dexter struggling to balance domestic obligations with his murderous proclivities, he seeks to learn from the Trinity Killer – a beloved family man who appears to have his own 'Dark Passenger' on lockdown. Arthur Mitchell's emotional rituals and abuse of his family are counterpoints to the comparatively composed Dexter, the tables turning as a bloody confrontation beckons. S4's *Hello, Dexter Morgan* sets the pair at loggerheads, culminating in the show's most devastating twist.

FRESH SPINS

Melancholy mixes and monster feels...

I SAW THE TV GLOW
★★★★★
Director Jane Schoenbrun tunes into haunting wavelengths with the music for their horror-slash-trans allegory. Alongside the ambient screen burn of Alex G's synthy score, Schoenbrun's self-curated 'mixtape from another dimension' suggests a 90s *Donnie Darko*, gorgeously. Artists variably hushed (Maria BC), dislocated (Yeule), dirge-y (King Woman) and jangly (Jay Som) feature, while alt-stars Caroline Polachek/The Weather Station transmit lush anthemics, and Sloppy Jane/Phoebe Bridgers steal the show with the serene *Claw Machine*. Cult love calls.

A QUIET PLACE: DAY ONE
★★★★½
Pig composer Alexis Grapsas follows Marco Beltrami (quietly) with confident couplings of heart and horror here. Piano and woodwinds introduce warm, welcoming motifs on *Samira's Theme* and *Marionette*, before *Subway Tunnels* maxes the rumbling dread. Elsewhere, panic (*Revolving Door*) and suspense (*Day One*) mount surely. The action cues squander some character, but the finale suite of *You Can Hear It When You're Quiet* testifies to Grapsas' emotional grip with elegant tenderness.

CLASSIC TRACKS
GIORGIO MORODER

Ten on-screen classics from the Italian legend...

CHASE
***MIDNIGHT EXPRESS*, 1978**
Moroder's Donna Summer work inspired director Alan Parker to hire the synth/disco pioneer for some escape music. In reply, Moroder bagged an Oscar for his proto-Hi-NRG issue of insistent, indelible synths: 'This inevitable stream of notes,' as Hans Zimmer put it.

***CALL ME*, BLONDIE**
***AMERICAN GIGOLO*, 1980**
Barrelling along like *I Feel Love* on guitars, the opener to Paul Schrader's thriller was 'a driving song', said Moroder. It was also emphatically a Moroder song; his session musos, Harold Faltermeyer included, gathered behind Debbie Harry's gale-force vocal.

***CAT PEOPLE (PUTTING OUT FIRE)*, DAVID BOWIE**
***CAT PEOPLE*, 1982**
'Schrader wanted a very dark sound,' recalled Moroder, who answered the request in kind – all low notes, backwards mixes, guitar dirges. Bowie's off-the-scale vocal ('Gaso-LEEEEEEENE!') maxes the gothic grandeur, while Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* relit the fire in style.

***FLASHDANCE... WHAT A FEELING*, IRENE CARA**
***FLASHDANCE*, 1983**
Post-*Gigolo*, Jerry Bruckheimer employed Moroder for his dancing-welder hit. With motivational lyrics from Ken Forsey and singer Irene Cara, Moroder delivered an irresistible MTV-era tentpole: after a yearning synth intro, Oscar-grade positivity erupts.

TONY'S THEME
***SCARFACE*, 1983**
Moroder confessed himself 'really proud' of the main theme for Brian De Palma's thriller, a church-y requiem dripping with fatalism and atmospheric menace. See also *Push It to the Limit*, a cocaine-paced pile-driver much reused in training montages.

***THE NEVERENDING STORY*, LIMAHL**
***THE NEVERENDING STORY*, 1984**
Like they've always been there, Moroder's synths sound eternal for the fade-in to the ex-Kajagoogoo singer's hit. With *Scarface* singer Beth Andersen harmonising, *The NeverEnding Story* delivers more uplift than Limahl's hairspray: *Stranger Things*' Dusty Bun and Suzie Poo agreed.

***TOGETHER IN ELECTRIC DREAMS*, PHILIP OAKEY & GIORGIO MORODER**
***ELECTRIC DREAMS*, 1984**
The movie was goofy, but Moroder and Human Leaguer Oakey delivered a keeper in record time. Fluttering synths and a heroically soaring guitar herald an exuberant anthem of computer love; Oakey's over-stretched vocal range only adds to the charm.

***TAKE MY BREATH AWAY*, BERLIN**
***TOP GUN*, 1986**
Moroder's favourite of his songs knows no shame: between the sultry synth bass, slow-motion melody and singer Terri Nunn's projection of mounting anticipation, Moroder's ballad was one of the great 80s lust songs. Wong Kar-wai's *As Tears Go By* paid dazzling tribute.

***I FEEL LOVE*, DONNA SUMMER**
***AMERICAN HUSTLE*, 2013**
Moroder, Pete Bellotte and Donna Summer transformed club culture with their unstoppable classic, the sound of disco rising to rule. Hitting the dancefloor in David O. Russell's crime-com, Bradley Cooper and Amy Adams – duly – put their hips into it.

UTOPIA - ME GIORGIO
***CLIMAX*, 2018**
After a night of heavy dancefloor bacchanalia, who better to score the climax than Moroder? As director Gaspar Noé's camera combs the wreckage, the disco king's warm, lustrous 1977 signature song sounds like the party you never want to leave. **KEVIN HARLEY**

PARAMOUNT PICTURES, A24 MUSIC, MILAN RECORDS

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EXTRAS

VARIOUS

THE MAXXXINE COLLECTION

OUT NOW

Do not accept merch you do not deserve! Instead, check out A24's collection celebrating the greatest Minx since Minnie. There's a whole collab with Online Ceramics, comprising T-shirts, bumper sticker, crew jacket and thong (bonus cult-movie points for every nod to film-within-a-film *The Puritan II*). There's also a varsity jacket, Hollywood Star keychain and a make-up set that'll turn you into a 'VHS Vixen' (presumably not in a *Fox and the Hound* sense). Go eXXXercise your wallet at shop.a24films.

COLLECTIBLE

LEGO BRICKHEADZ BATMAN 8 IN 1

OUT NOW

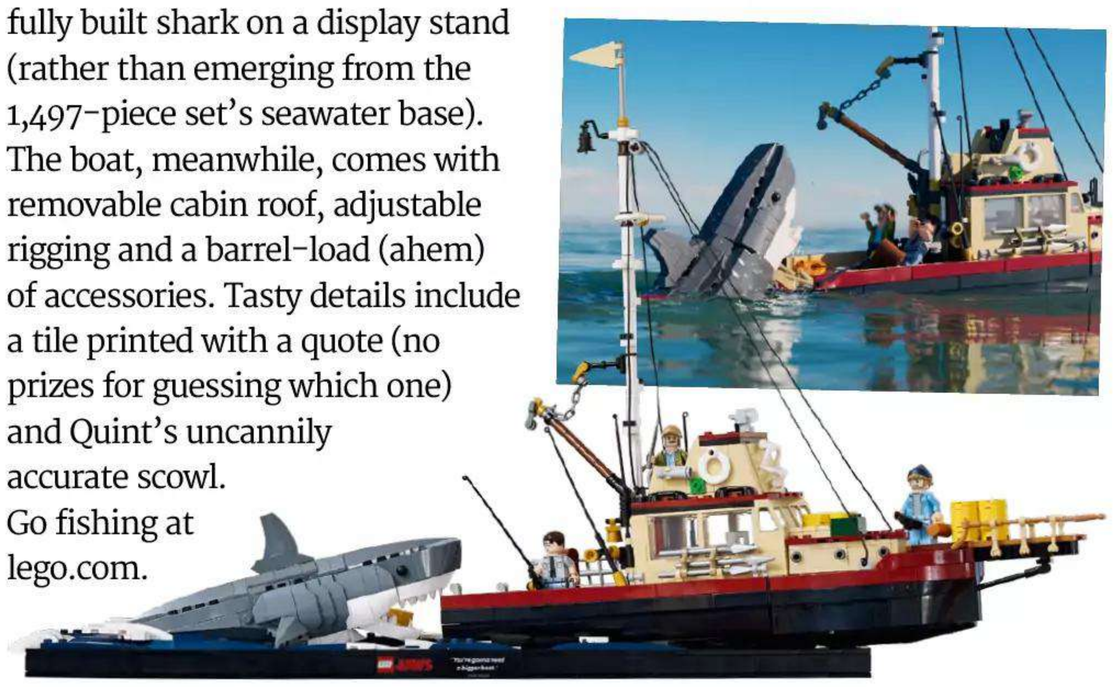
A Lego set that can be whatever Gotham, and more importantly brick-fanciers, need it to be. Comprising 325 pieces in total, it's buildable eight different way(ne)s: Bronze Age Batman, Classic TV Series Batman (there's no mistaking those eyebrows), Batman 89, Animated Series Batman, Nolan's Dark Knight, Batfleck, R-Batz and, of course, Lego Batman himself, with glow-in-the-dark eyes. Each BrickHead stands 3.5in tall, give or take (89 is the clear winner of the pointiest ears contest). Suit up at lego.com.

COLLECTIBLE

LEGO IDEAS JAWS

OUT NOW

Proof that you can never have too many Lego Bruces on one page, this delicious diorama captures Spielberg's Great White as it prepares to dine on the Orca. But if you don't want to make a scene, you can pop the fully built shark on a display stand (rather than emerging from the 1,497-piece set's seawater base). The boat, meanwhile, comes with removable cabin roof, adjustable rigging and a barrel-load (ahem) of accessories. Tasty details include a tile printed with a quote (no prizes for guessing which one) and Quint's uncannily accurate scowl. Go fishing at lego.com.



APPAREL

LAST EXIT TO NOWHERE CLOTHING

OUT NOW

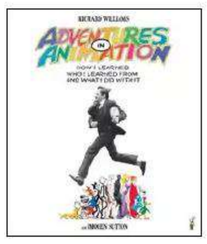
Four extremely fan-some new shirts from the film/TV-inspired clothing specialist. We have two John Carpenter mash-ups: one riffing on the musical duo of the same name, a la *They Live* (*Gross to You*, anyone?); the other featuring *The Thing* fiendishly hiding inside Saul Bass' poster design for *The Shining*. Elsewhere, the Maximum Overdrive tee (motor)showcases iconic cars (Batmobile! Herbie!) while Robot pays homage to Robbie, RoboCop and more. Make chrome in your life for lastexittonowhere.com.

MATTHEW LEYLAND

A24, LAST EXIT TO NOWHERE, LEGO

2 MORE

From Toontown to the Snyderverse...



ADVENTURES IN ANIMATION

★★★★★

Richard Williams, the man who brought Roger Rabbit and 1971's celebrated *A Christmas Carol* to life, takes us on a tour of his formidable career in animation. With the three-time Oscar-winner having passed in 2019, the book was completed posthumously by co-writer/wife Imogen Sutton. Comprehensively subtitled *How I Learned, Who I Learned From and What I Did with It*, it's a fitting complement to Williams' *Animator's Survival Kit*, similarly packed with both his art and wisdom. **JH**

REBEL MOON: HOUSE OF THE BLOODAXE

★★★★★

For Zack Snyder's army of fans, this is a comic-book prequel to his two-film sci-fi opus. The director conceived the story, and it comes scripted by Magdalene Visaggio (*Vagrant Queen*) with art from Clark Bint (*Murder Most Mundane*). Set five years before *Rebel Moon*, the tale takes us to the planet Shasu, delving into the backstory of outlaw revolutionaries Devra and Darrian Bloodaxe. As with the films, the earnest myth-building of this latest Snyderverse spectacular makes it heavy going, but at least the artwork thrills. **JM**

BOOKS

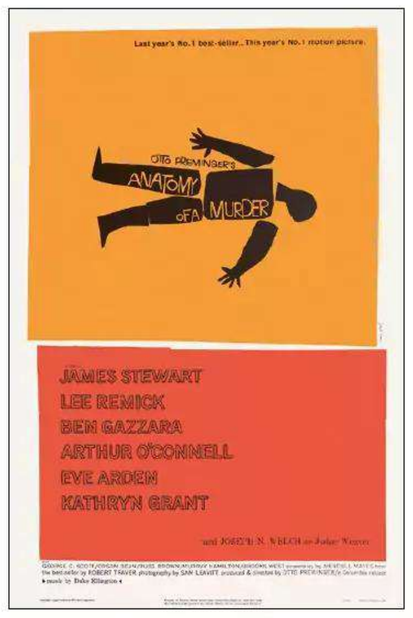
1001 MOVIE POSTERS: DESIGNS OF THE TIMES

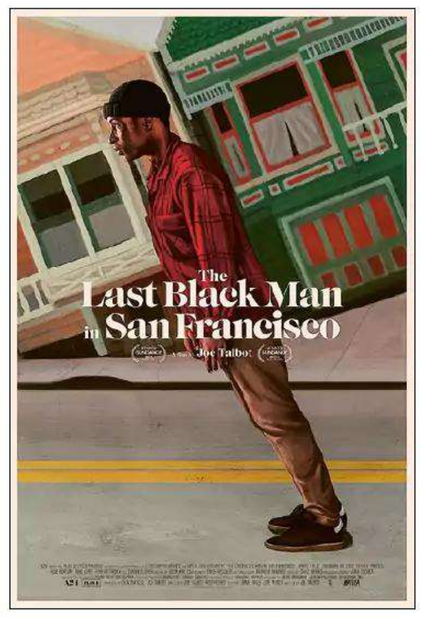
★★★★★ **TONY NOURMAND, GRAHAM MARSH, CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING AND ALISON ELANGASINGHE** REEL ART PRESS

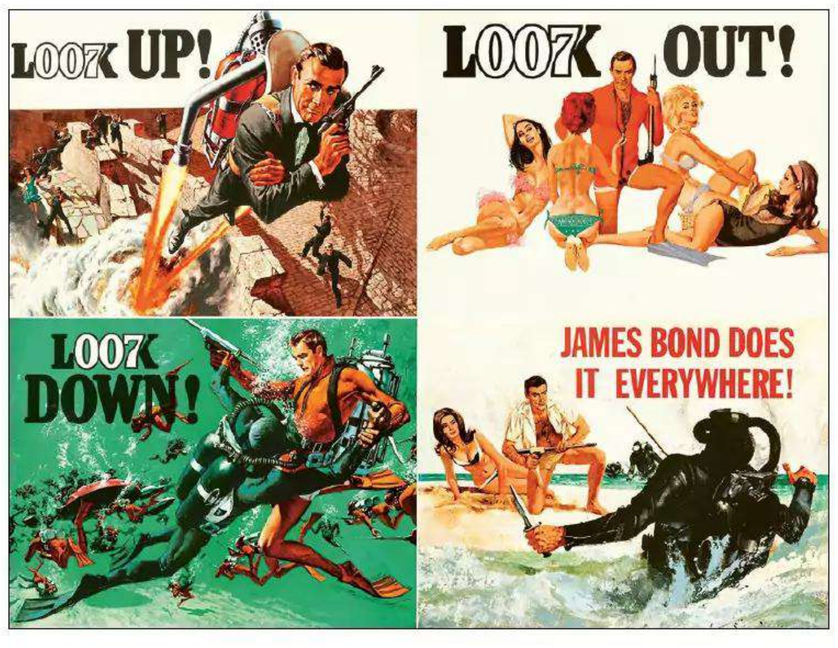
Embarrassment of riches' doesn't quite cover this compilation of one sheets, quads and panels, edited by poster authority Tony Nourmand. Spanning more than a century of images gathered from over 20 countries, it's a celebration of an art form that, as Christopher Frayling's introduction remarks, hasn't always benefitted from its ties to advertising, marketing and hucksterism.

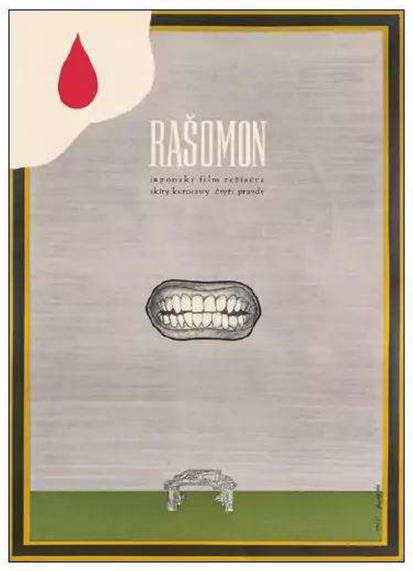
There's plenty of the latter in this hefty tome's 640 pages, from the cleavage-heavy artwork for Jane Russell's *The Outlaw* ('The picture that couldn't be stopped!') to the fanciful claims made for William Castle's *The Tingler* ('When the screen screams you'll scream too… if you value your life!'). Yet there's plenty of subtlety too, particularly in items from Hungary, Poland and the former Czechoslovakia, which offer innovative alternatives to their western counterparts.

The sheer volume of posters included here can sometimes overwhelm. Yet it does pay dividends: placards for two versions of *Scarface* released 50 years apart present a vivid distillation of the way cinematic iconography evolved in the interim. Alison Elangasinghe's capsule biogs of the illustrators, art directors and graphic designers behind posters we've known for decades offer valuable context – and nuggets of trivia too. Who knew, for instance, that Bill Gold hadn't even seen *Casablanca* when he devised its magisterial three sheet? **NEIL SMITH**









ANATOMY OF A MURDER, THE LAST BLACK MAN IN SAN FRANCISCO, RAŠOMON, MIDNIGHT COWBOY, © REEL ART PRESS

ARMCHAIR CINEMA

★★★★★

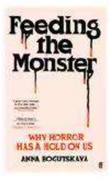
SHELDON HALL EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS

Those who spent their childhoods poring over the *Radio Times* will get a nostalgic buzz from this study of films that aired on television from 1929 to 1981. The first of two planned volumes, it's a dense history of a period when movies first became available at home – and the lasting impact that had on both nervy studios and sofa cinephiles. Rigorously researched and illustrated with schedules and magazine-cover art, it's a compelling vision of days of TV past. **JOEL HARLEY**

FEEDING THE MONSTER

★★★★★

ANNA BOGUTSKAYA FABER



Subtitled *Why Horror Has a Hold on Us*, this brisk, sharp study makes a strong case for the genre's recent successes. Bogutskaya transcends mere list-making to dissect how horror courts physical and emotional reactions. A sense that troubled times offer 'ripe' soil emerges through well-developed themes (trauma, anxiety) and motifs (the house, the maternal body). And ranging from choreomania to cannibalism, Bogutskaya suggests horror feeds on the experiential. **KEVIN HARLEY**

I LOVE ROMCOMS & I AM A FEMINIST

★★★★★

CORRINA ANTROBUS WHITE LION

Winningly illustrated by Lily O'Farrell (sorry, 'Vulga Drawings'), this is a lively guide to 100 romantic comedies that have helped to advance female representation and/or 'hauled the genre up from a steaming gutter of sexism'. Films span a century of cinema, from the pioneering *Miss Lulu Bett* (1921) to last year's *Barbie*. Amplifying Black and LGBTQ+ voices, Antrobus offers a witty, knowledgeable reconciliation of genre with contemporary feminism. **JOEL HARLEY**

REEL ART PRESS, FABER, WHITE LION, EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, TITAN

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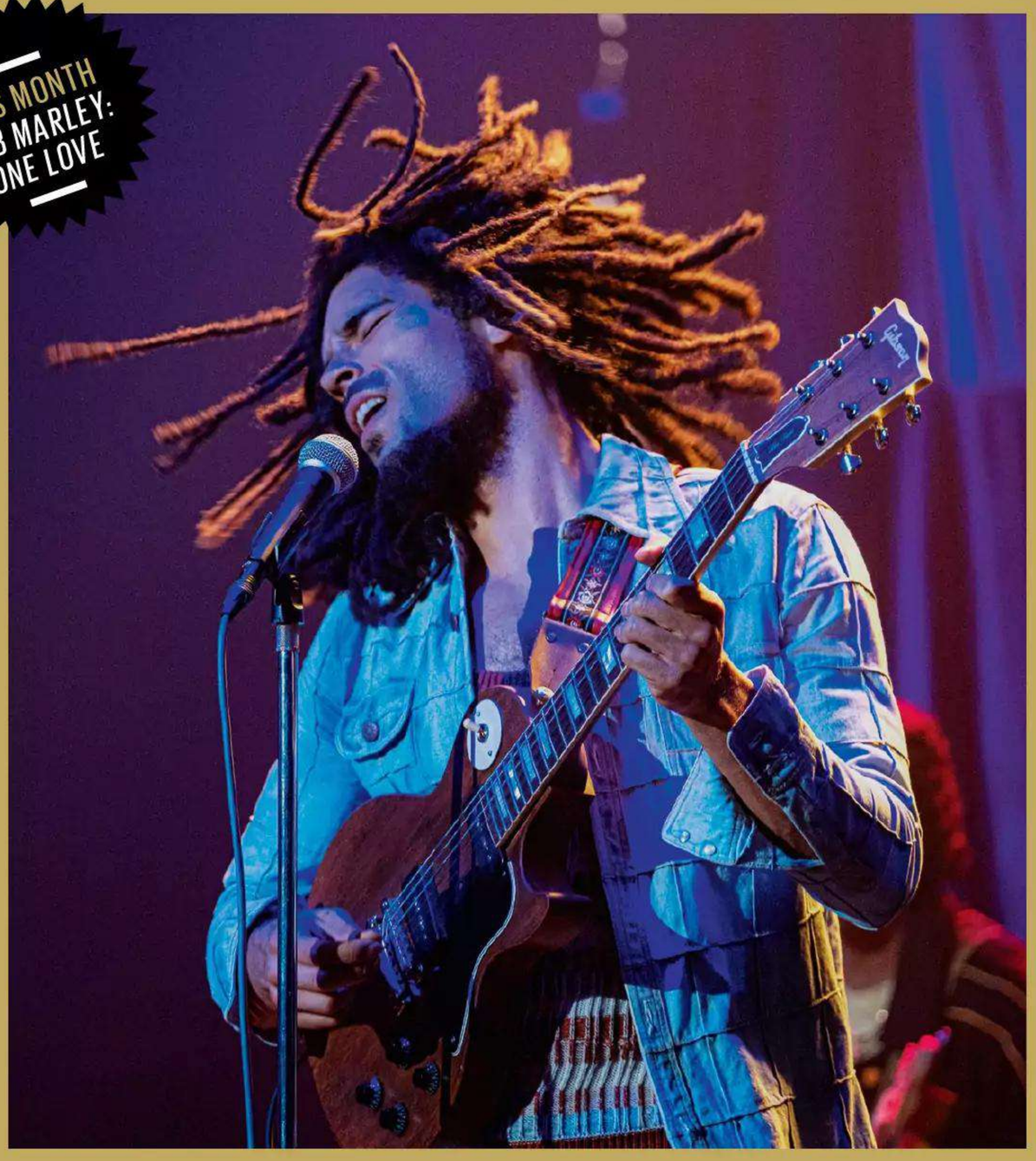
IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

THIS MONTH BOB MARLEY: ONE LOVE



Q In *Bob Marley: One Love*, the reggae icon (Kingsley Ben-Adir) plays a concert two days after an assassination attempt and, later, forgives his would-be shooter. True?

The broad strokes of the attempted killing are true, although the film stirs it up with some artistic liberties. On 3 December 1976, gunmen did arrive at Marley's 56 Hope Road house. Marley's wife Rita was shot in her car, though reggae expert Roger Steffens says manager Don Taylor was shot five times, not six. Steffens also refutes the image of Taylor leaping to protect Marley, claiming the kitchen was too small for that manoeuvre. Everyone survived and Marley played at the Smile Jamaica concert two days later, giving a longer set than implied on-screen. Later, the movie suggests Marley forgave one of the shooters. However, Steffens sees this as a version of Marley's 1977 encounter with a man who claimed he was supposed to be one of the shooters, but had lost his gun. Marley responded by inviting him on tour. Conversely, Don Taylor's book *Marley and Me* says he and Marley witnessed the trial and execution of three of the shooters in 1978. Taylor's claim has been challenged, but it presents a more complex picture.

VERDICT NOT BOLLOCKS, MOSTLY

ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies... STARRING JUDE LAW

01	**CAPTAIN MARVEL** 2019	$1.1B
02	**FANTASTIC BEASTS: THE CRIMES OF GRINDELWALD** 2018	$655.8M
03	**SHERLOCK HOLMES: A GAME OF SHADOWS** 2011	$543.8M
04	**SHERLOCK HOLMES** 2009	$524M
05	**FANTASTIC BEASTS: THE SECRETS OF DUMBLEDORE** 2022	$407.2M
06	**RISE OF THE GUARDIANS** 2012	$306.9M
07	**A.I.: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE** 2001	$235.9M
08	**SPY** 2015	$235.7M
09	**LEMONY SNICKET'S SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS** 2004	$211.5M
10	**THE AVIATOR** 2004	$213.7M

ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA

WHAT? In heist-inside-the-mind thriller *Inception*, Dom (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Ariadne (Elliot Page) stroll around the latter's recreation of Paris, before folding it like a hall of mirrors.

WHERE? Pont de Bir-Hakeim, Paris

GO? The two-levelled steel bridge crosses the Seine, so you can head there for photo-ops/mind-crime recces. The iconic structure also appears in heist staples *Rififi* and *Ronin*.

ALAMY, DISNEY, WARNER

Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com

10 OF THE BEST

KEYS IN MOVIES

Lock and load...

1 HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

'They're not birds!' HP says as he enters a third chamber in search of the magical stone. They're flapping about like pissed-off bats, but Potter must catch the one with a broken wing while on a broomstick. We've all done that after the pub.

2 NOTORIOUS

The secret at the heart of Nazi activity in Brazil is locked in a wine cellar belonging to Ingrid Bergman's husband. She needs to get the key to US spy Cary Grant in Hitchcock's exemplary thriller. Grant later kept the prop, gifting it to Bergman – who returned it to Hitch years after.

3 PULP FICTION

Boxer Butch toys with a number of things (hammer, bat, chainsaw) as he flees a pawn-shop gimp cellar, but ends up swiping a katana and Zed's keys. The Z-adorned bunch gives him a life-saving ride aboard his potential rapist's chopper. Zed's most certainly dead, baby.

4 E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL

Spielberg's space turd is pursued from forest to Elliott's home by a faceless government spook, only identified for much of the film by the jangling set of keys on his belt. A genius detail devised to give audiences a child's POV of adults.

5 MULHOLLAND DRIVE

The blue key exists in dream and real worlds in David Lynch's Pandora's box classic. Left on a coffee table to denote a successful contract killing, used to open a blue box and also the locking mechanism to a home – it unleashes suffering, sadness and loss. Blue indeed.

6 MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE – DEAD RECKONING PART ONE

The McGuffin that gives Tom Cruise permission to car chase around Rome, destroy a train and jump a motorbike off a mountain is a cruciform unlocking mechanism. Like *Dead Reckoning* itself, it's a polished, good-looking two-parter.

7 PAN'S LABYRINTH

Franco-era kid Ofelia needs a key from a tree toad's gut to complete her magical quest. Covered in gunk, she feeds him stones to make him vomit up the item plus his entire insides. Complicated and stressful – like trying to get in the key box on some Airbnbs.

8 THE GOONIES

Treasure-seeker Chester Copperpot claimed to have found the key to One-Eyed Willy's treasure and the skull key discovered by the Goonies on a corpse under the Lighthouse Lounge restaurant looks a lot like it. Unlike Copperpot, the Goonies never say die.

9 THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL

Key porn for two straight minutes in Wes Anderson's hotel romp, as the various concierge members of the Society of the Crossed Keys call each other across Europe. Each phone call shows the fobbed and tasselled room keys of lux hotels. Cagophilists rejoice!

10 CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE FIRST AVENGER

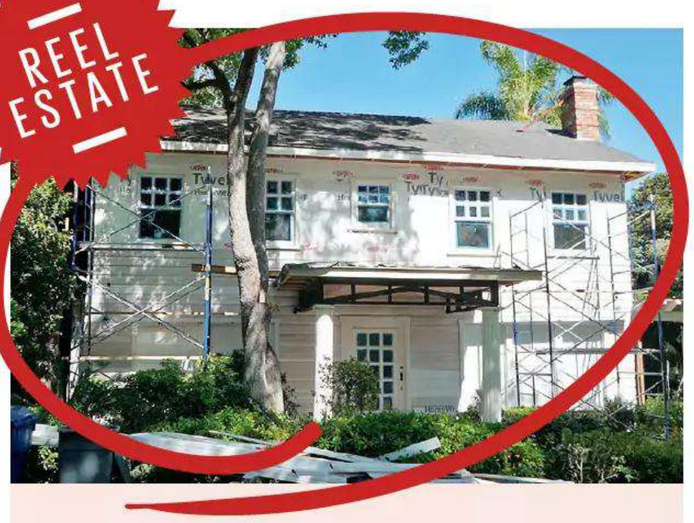
As the car-proud Red Skull hands his suitably stylish key over to Dr. Zola, he entreats him not to put a scratch on his phallic, 16-cylinder beast. No doubt the punishment for dings is vaporisation.

JANE CROWTHER

ALAMY

Did we miss something? Let us know on @totalfilm

REEL ESTATE



FOR SALE This Victorian house in the suburbs might be dilapidated compared to the other tidy suburban homes of the area, but it is nothing that a lick of paint won't rectify. Going at a very reasonable price because (full disclosure) of a family tragedy in an upstairs bedroom. But that was many years ago. The perfect residence for a young family. Teenage babysitters are in abundance, and the tree-lined streets come into their own each autumn, lit by jack-o'-lanterns. Potential buyers might want to consider cosy lighting and warm-coloured curtains – the windows, like the eyes of the previous resident, are blank, pale, emotionless…

HINDSIGHT CORNER

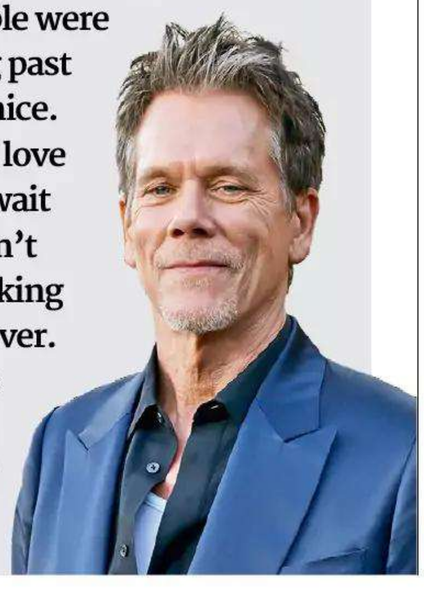
KEVIN BACON
ON FAME

December 2016

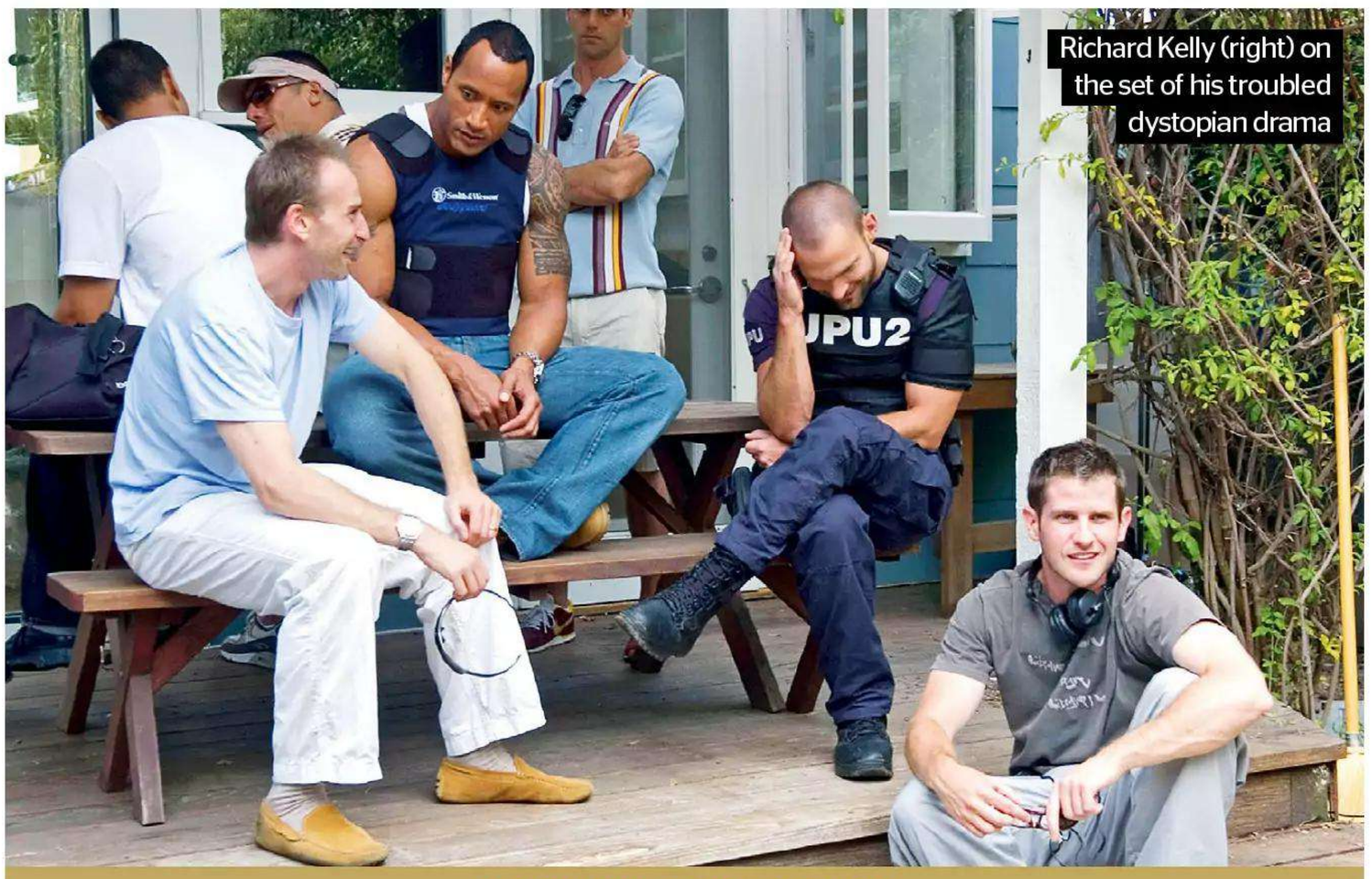
'I had a hard time embracing [fame], and the things that came to me.'

July 2024

'I went to a special-effects make-up artist, had consultations, and asked him to make me a prosthetic disguise… People were kind of pushing past me, not being nice. Nobody said, "I love you." I had to wait in line to, I don't know, buy a fucking coffee or whatever. I was like, "This sucks. I want to go back to being famous."'



FLOP CULTURE



Richard Kelly (right) on the set of his troubled dystopian drama

SOUTHLAND TALES

After *Donnie Darko*, Richard Kelly took a mighty swing with his second feature. The ambition proved easier to admire in theory than in motion…

Why it was a good idea (on paper)

For writer/director Richard Kelly, *Southland Tales* seemed set to prove *Donnie Darko* was no fluke. With rising stars on board, including Sarah Michelle Gellar, Seann William Scott, Justin Timberlake and Dwayne Johnson, Kelly's sci-fi politico-pop-art satire promised ideas and ambition in abundance.

What went wrong?

In contention for a Nic Cage movie (*Knowing*) and an X-Men outing (*The Last Stand*) post-*Darko*, Kelly instead nurtured the urge to make something bolder, more personal. The problem was, he did – and for most viewers, the reach was more impressive than the result. With a vision bigger than his budget, he had $17m – and a mere 29-day shoot – for a film that he later said needed $50m. Much of the money went on location fees. He increased Timberlake and Gellar's roles on the hoof, too, perhaps losing his grip on the script. The film reached Cannes in 2006 as a 160-minute unfinished cut, where Sony bought it but critics went ballistic. Many found the film overindulgent and incoherent, a problem not improved when distributor pressures to make heavy cuts afterwards meant losing some explanatory scenes. Money for improved effects was not forthcoming either, meaning Kelly would later describe the under-marketed film, which reached fewer than 50 US cinemas 18 months post-Cannes, as – still – unfinished. No wonder ticket-buyers shied away.

Redeeming feature

Moby's melancholy score is one of the few restrained things about Kelly's grand folly. It's hard not to see some prescience, too, in the way the story depicts a confrontation of trash culture with political tensions.

What happened next?

The fallout damaged Kelly's career badly. *The Box* (2009) was an underpowered return, while other proposed Kelly projects – *Corpus Christi*, *Amicus* – remain sadly unopened.

Should it be remade?

No, but Kelly has revisited the film and teased an 'expanded version' for streaming platforms. #ReleasetheKellycut? **KEVIN HARLEY**

BUDGET	BOX OFFICE	AWARDS	TF STAR RATING	ROTTEN TOMATOES
$17M	$375K	0	★★☆☆	41%

ALAMY, GETTY

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IS IT JUST ME?

Even after 21 years, we still don't know why all the rum is gone

IS IT JUST ME OR DID BLOCKBUSTERS PEAK WITH *POTC*?

JOEL HARLEY
@JOELHARLEY

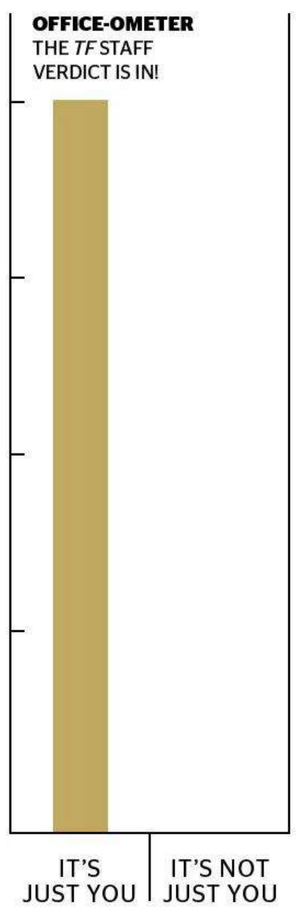
In the summer of 2003, director Gore Verbinski released his, uh, theme-park-ride tie-in, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. With the box-office shipwreck that was *Cutthroat Island* (1995) still fresh in the memory, expectations were modest. A live-action Disney film based on a park ride? That didn't exactly work out for *Tower of Terror* (1997) or *The Country Bears* (2002).

Regardless, *Pirates* took cinemas by storm. Audiences were thrilled by a transgressive (and ultimately Oscar-nominated) performance from a star at the top of his game and by the assured swagger of Verbinski's direction. Extravagant cinematography and a seamless blend of practical and digital effects lent pomp and circumstance to the action, while Klaus Badelt and Hans Zimmer's hearty score gave this old-fashioned yet hypermodern blockbuster yet more irresistible oomph.

Meanwhile, sympathetic stars Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley made an endearingly earnest contrast to Johnny Depp and Geoffrey Rush's wildly enjoyable scenery-chewing. Undead pirates, swashbuckling sword fights, bombastic boat battles, sizzling chemistry… *The Curse of the Black Pearl* truly had everything.

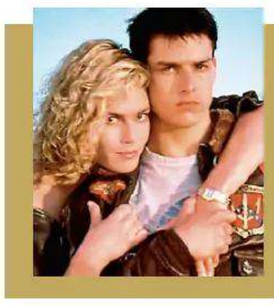
Two sequels (2006's *Dead Man's Chest*, 2007's *At World's End*) capitalised on its success, upping the scale (and budget) while keeping the sumptuous on-location photography and intricate world-building. Davy Jones became a villain for the ages, with Bill Nighy delivering a searing motion-capture performance that wouldn't be matched until Josh Brolin rampaged through 2018's *Avengers: Infinity War*.

OFFICE-OMETER
THE *TF* STAFF VERDICT IS IN!



Further follow-ups in 2011 and 2017 may have tarnished the brand, but the core trilogy still stands as a monument to unbridled directorial vision that now seems unrepeatable. Auteur-led successes such as *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Villeneuve's Dune films and the Cruise-controlled Mission: Impossible franchise have kept the flame alight but, in a post-MCU/DCEU/Disney-era Star Wars world, the landscape of blockbuster cinema is strewn with the flotsam and jetsam of heinous visuals (pay your VFX artists!) and a profound lack of risk-taking. It took 20 years for the blockbuster to genuinely surprise again… this time with a film based on a plastic doll, rather than an on-the-rails boat ride. But the original Pirates of the Caribbean trilogy, especially *Black Pearl*, remains the pinnacle of tent-pole cinema, yet to be bettered. Or is it just me?

Share your reaction at gamesradar.com/totalfilm or on Facebook and X.



ALAMY

LAST TIME TOM CRUISE: UNDERRATED ACTOR?

RUTHIEB63
I quit watching the Oscars after he didn't win for *Born on the Fourth of July*!

MICHAEL WEYER
He would've had an Oscar by now if he'd done more dramas rather than playing Ethan Hunt and Maverick again.

RONNIE MARTIN
He's not a great, versatile actor... but he is good at what he does.

JEAN CHAPLEAU
He's very uneven. But when he's vulnerable he does miracles.

CHRIS MCLARTY
He's severely underrated as an actor.

UNSUNG HEROES

GIVING CREDIT

Saluting the behind-the-scenes talent making movie magic.

DOUGLAS INGRAM STORYBOARD ARTIST

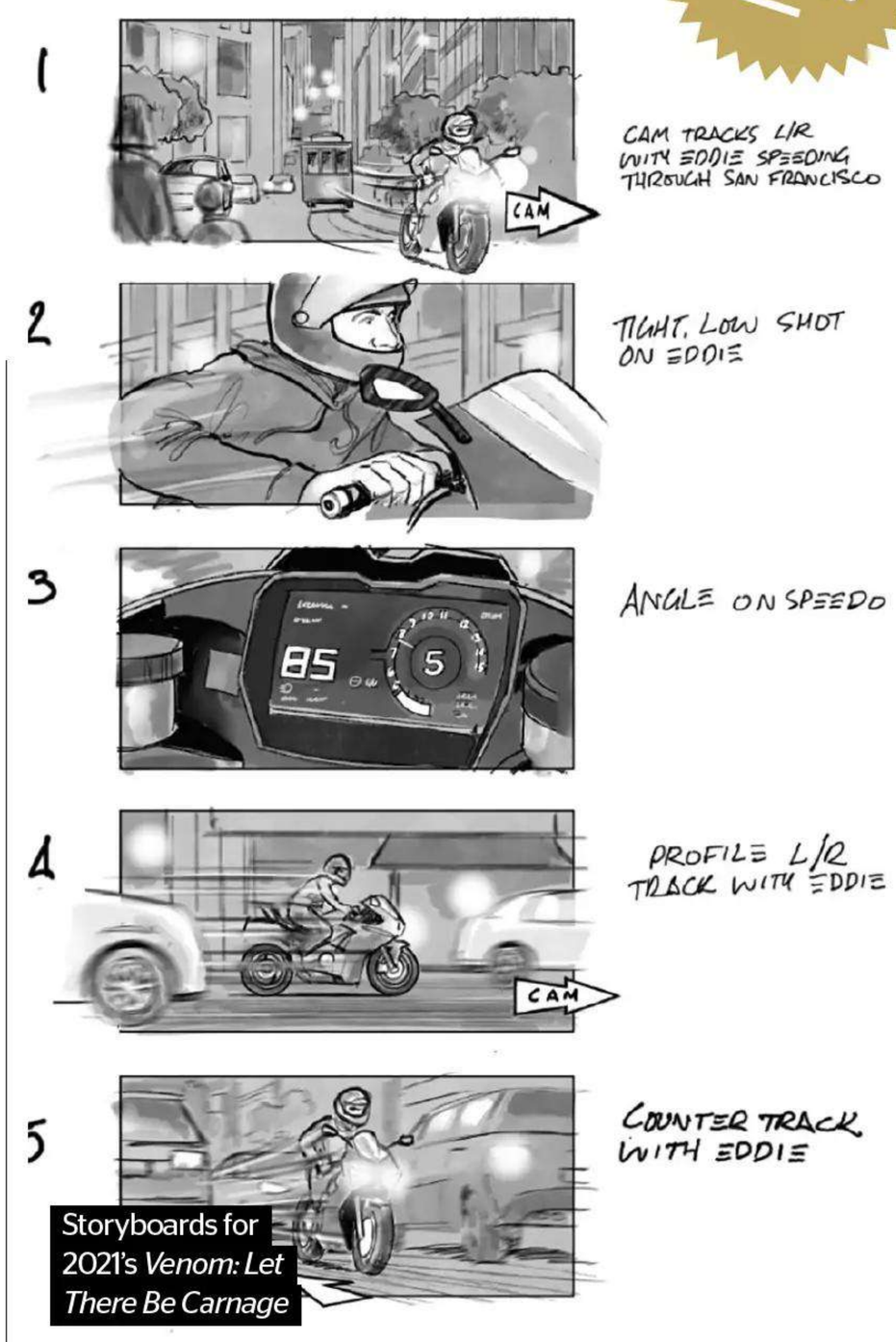
Douglas Ingram is a London-based storyboard artist who has worked on films, TV shows, gaming and commercials. He's a member of BECTU (the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union), British Film Designers Guild, the Association of Illustrators and the British Cartoonists' Association, and has received certificates of appreciation from the Art Directors Guild for his work on *The King's Speech* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. He's storyboarded for *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Edge of Tomorrow*, *Les Misérables*, *Paddington*, *Batman Begins*, *Venom: Let There Be Carnage* and *Fast & Furious 6* among numerous credits.

Describe your job in simple terms…
Producing a series of drawings to show what the director has in mind, to help explain to other departments such as VFX or stunts what is required. At times I need to be a bit of a mind reader!
I can also have a reasonable amount of input, which is rewarding. It can be a wonderfully collaborative process.

How did you get into storyboarding?
I mentioned to an old friend who is a long-established stunt coordinator that I was thinking of storyboards. The following week he asked me if I wanted to help out on a film that had lost some financial backing. I was offered two days' work with no pay in exchange for an end credit, so I jumped at it. Around the same time another friend who ran Bapty's film armoury asked me to design some weapons for *Cutthroat Island* – he suggested that I go to Shepperton and put my head round some doors, which I did, and landed my next film. I had no training or background in film, and felt like an imposter for the first few years.
So far no one has found me out!

What's been your most memorable moment of your career so far?
I don't think I have one in particular. Seeing the finished film on screen and sequences being close to what we had discussed and what I drew is always rewarding. So is going on recces to take reference photos. It can get me into some very interesting places like the roofs of historic buildings, the workings of Tower Bridge, or the Victorian reservoir under Finsbury Park.

What is the biggest misconception about being a storyboard artist?
I suppose people assume that it's highly glamorous and I go to premieres in a penguin suit on the red carpet – in fact, I have never been to one!



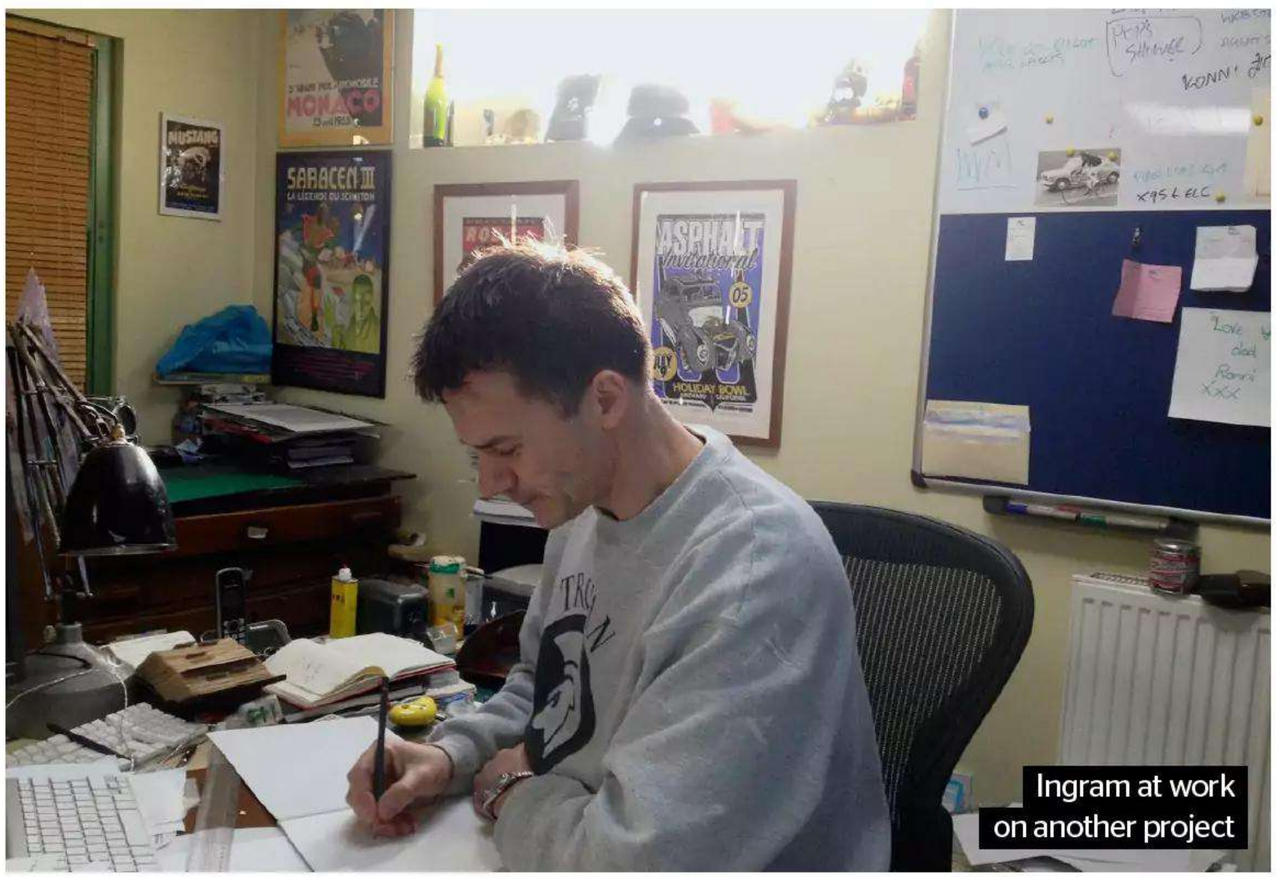
Storyboards for 2021's *Venom: Let There Be Carnage*

'I can have a reasonable amount of input, which is rewarding. It can be a wonderfully collaborative process'

Is there a particular director or genre you love working with/in?
I tend to gravitate towards historical stuff which potentially has interesting sets, locations and costumes which I find more interesting to draw. Car-related stuff, too; chase sequences and car commercials. I would love to do a western one day!

If someone wants to get into storyboarding, what should they do?
Study film sequences, break them down, draw your own version of how you would imagine the boards before you look at the real storyboards to see how they compare. Then make as many contacts as you can and keep trying!

JANE CROWTHER



Ingram at work on another project

DOUGLAS INGRAM

THIS MONTH
Habit and *Wendigo*

Thrilled by the trailer for Robert Eggers' *Nosferatu*, I found myself rewatching perhaps my favourite riff on Dracula to date, Larry Fessenden's New York indie *Habit* (1995).

Fessenden's horror factory Glass Eye Pix has birthed some of the most interesting horror helmers working today, including Ti West (*House of the Devil*, the X trilogy) and Jim Mickle (*Stake Land*, *We Are What We Are*). Fessenden's distinctive appearance, meanwhile – missing front tooth, crow's-nest hair – has helped land him character roles in a deluge of horror movies and dramas such as *The Brave One*, *Wendy and Lucy* and *Killers of the Flower Moon*. But it's his intermittent work as a director that most excites me, grounding genre myths in realistic milieus.

In *Habit*, Fessenden plays Sam, an alcoholic struggling with the death of his father and the end of his romantic relationship. At a Halloween party, he meets Anna (Meredith Snaider, mesmerising) and wakes up the next morning with a bite mark on his lip that won't heal. Anna mysteriously comes and goes over the following days – or rather, nights – and the health of our shambolic, untethered hero drains away.

Perhaps a vampire movie or perhaps a bleary-eyed, fuzzy-headed chronicle of the breakdown of a lonely, dysfunctional man in an impersonal city, *Habit*, shot on 16mm for $60,000 but boasting fabulous production values courtesy of city-wide location work, got none of the attention afforded to two other New York vampire indies of the time, *The Addiction* and *Nadja*. In fact, *Habit*'s UK premiere didn't arrive until 2022 – a whopping 27 years after its premiere at the Chicago International Film Festival ('a sad and haunting film,' said Roger Ebert).

If *Habit* is Fessenden's Dracula movie, then *Wendigo* (2001) is his Wolf Man picture. It's set amid the snowscapes of the Catskills, as New York couple Kim and George (Patricia Clarkson, Jake Weber) and their young son Miles (Erik Per Sullivan) spend a weekend at a friend's holiday cottage. On the drive there, they run into a deer, breaking its antlers and pissing off some local hunters. The escalating action that follows pits rural against city, instinct against reason, but the *Straws Dog*-style clashes are just a part of it – the film also raises ecological concerns and invokes the titular ancient horned spirit.

Conjuring scares from thin air (and the whining wind that stirs it), Fessenden again grafts the supernatural onto the recognisable to blur reality and fantasy. Look at the naturalistic acting, or the way Kim and George's often unvoiced resentments seep out to stain the blindingly white environment and cause Miles anxiety. But whereas *Habit* has a touch of Scorsese's squalid NYC or the relationship dramas of John Cassavetes, *Wendigo* is more aligned to the shadows-and-subtexts phantasmagorias of legendary producer Val Lewton (*Cat People*), or the shivery chills of Guillermo del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone* and J.A. Bayona's *The Orphanage*.

'Larry Fessenden is a filmmaker with an uncanny gift for the creation of unsettling moods… he makes unusual, almost handmade art horror films,' said the *Los Angeles Times* upon *Wendigo*'s release. If only more people realised it.

JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE…
FOR MORE RECOMMENDATIONS, FOLLOW @JAMIE_GRAHAM9 ON X/TWITTER

GOLDEN GRAHAMS

Editor-at-Large Jamie Graham unearths underrated classics…

See these if you liked…

DELIVERANCE 1972
City types are hounded by country folk in *Wendigo*. John Boorman's thriller is the daddy of the sub-genre.

TAXI DRIVER 1976
Like Travis Bickle, *Habit*'s Sam is a damaged guy feeling alone in the swarming city of New York.

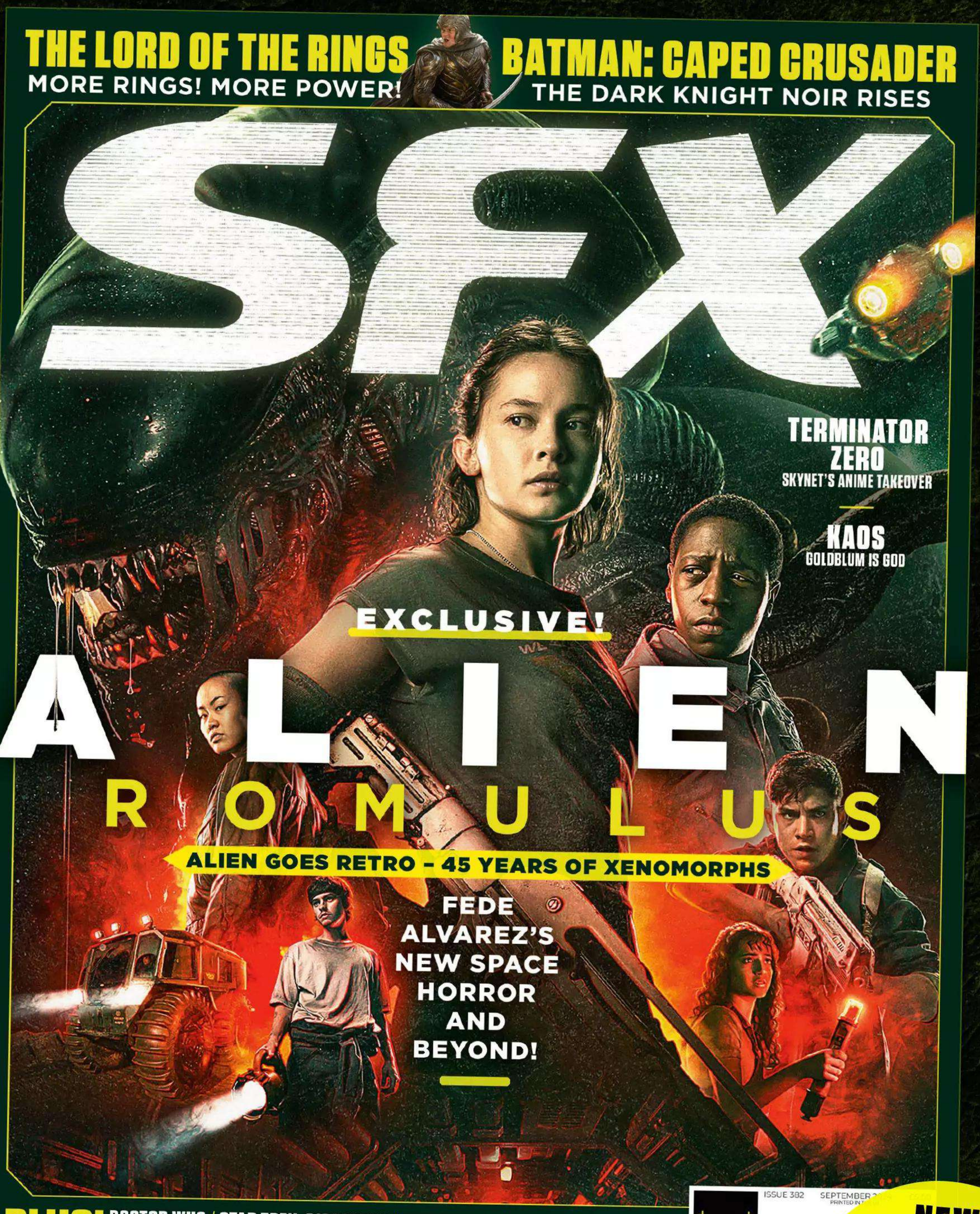
MARTIN 1977
There's something of the 70s auteur to Fessenden. And *Habit*, like Romero's *Martin*, brings grubby realism to the vampire movie.

THE SHINING 1980
Wendigo leans into its snowbound isolation. No-one knows more about that than the Torrance family.

ONE MORE…
NO TELLING 1991
The riff on *Frankenstein* in what Fessenden calls his 'trilogy of revisionist horror movies'.

ALAMY

THE WORLD'S NUMBER ONE SCI-FI, FANTASY & HORROR MAGAZINE



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1949-2024

SHELLEY DUVALL

I try not to intellectualise,' said Shelley Duvall, who died aged 75 on 11 July. A deeply intuitive and singular actor, she was unerring in her instincts, with tributes from Stephen King, Mia Farrow, Edgar Wright and many more testifying as much. As film critic and fan Pauline Kael once wrote, 'She doesn't seem to owe anything to anyone.'

Born in Fort Worth, Texas, Duvall had a peripatetic upbringing before her parents settled in Houston. She had no intentions of acting until she dropped out of studying science at junior college. At a party to showcase her then boyfriend's paintings in Houston, members of director Robert Altman's crew encountered the 20-year-old and were so struck by her that they engineered a meeting with the filmmaker. She and Altman were mutually wary, but he cast her in his black comedy *Brewster McCloud* - and she stole the film.

Duvall became a key player in Altman's rep cast and, by extension, in some of New Hollywood's boldest films. She was a standout as the mail-order bride in *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, as *Nashville*'s unforgettable 'L.A. Joan', and as the innocent garage worker's daughter in the lyrical *Thieves Like Us*. 'I knew you were good, but I didn't know you were great,' Altman told her encouragingly afterwards.

She was greater still in Altman's dreamlike *3 Women*, her off-kilter but stealthily affecting performance banking a Cannes award. And although *Popeye* flopped, Altman cast impeccably. Rather than playing down to Olive Oyl, Duvall brought depths of pathos and empathy to her silent-comic-style gesturalism.

'There is an openness about her,' said Roger Ebert, pinpointing a quality of unguarded clarity that was vital to *The Shining*. Working with Stanley Kubrick was famously stressful, requiring her to maintain a heightened intensity across innumerable takes. 'It was,' she understated, 'very hard.' But as Edgar Wright noted, the film's 'power stands and falls' on Duvall, whose emotions cut through the film's enigmas and skewers us no less surely than Jack Nicholson's axe.

Elsewhere, she found it tough to get work with directors outside Altman, but those who cast her got gold. She was terrifically deadpan as the reporter in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, great fun as half of an eternal couple in *Time Bandits*, haunting in Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie*, and likeable as the confidante in *Roxanne*.

Later, she continued to notch up credits in films from Jane Campion's classy *The Portrait of a Lady* to Guy Maddin's deliciously skewed *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*. Meanwhile, many will remember her as a TV pioneer, as she created and hosted the starry anthology series *Faerie Tale Theatre* (1982-87). In that lilting yet direct voice, she would introduce each episode by saying, 'Hello, I'm Shelley Duvall.' No one would mistake her for anyone else. **KEVIN HARLEY**

RON GALELLA/GETTY

THE *TF* BRAIN

WHICH WITCH ARE YOU?

Are you on song or on the rampage? Friendly with cats or at war with aggressive bird puppets? Find out below!

START

ARE YOU FOND OF A WARBLE?

NO

BUT IS THERE WARBLING AFOOT?

YES

EXTOLLING THE JOYS OF WORK (FFS) OR YOUR DEMISE (FFS!!)?

WORK

YOU ARE
THE WITCH/ QUEEN
SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

DING DONG

YOU ARE
THE WICKED WITCH OF THE WEST
THE WIZARD OF OZ

NO

HOW SCARY ARE YOU?

AS SCARY AS SATAN

KIDS: DESTROY 'EM ALL, OR DESTROY ALL BUT THEM?

LITTLE DARLINGS!

YOU ARE
SCARLET WITCH

LITTLE SHITS!

YOU ARE
THE GRAND HIGH WITCH

YOU ARE
KIKI

AS SCARY AS SANTA

YOUR CAT: BIG-EYED BALL OF CUTE OR GARFIELD WITH A HANGOVER?

CUTE

GRRRFIELD

YOU ARE
HERMIONE GRANGER

YOU ARE
GROTBAGS

YES

BUT DO YOU WAIT IN THE WINGS, OR HOG THE SPOTLIGHT ASAP?

WINGS

YOU ARE
AGATHA HARKNESS

SPOTLIGHT

YOUR NEMESIS: INTREPID MERMAID, PLUCKY KIDS OR PSYCHOTIC EMU?

MERMAID

YOU ARE
URSULA
THE LITTLE MERMAID

KIDS

YOU ARE
THE SANDERSON SISTERS
HOCUS POCUS

EMU

DISNEY, STUDIO GHIBLI, WARNER BROS.

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NAME THE FRAME

Can you guess which movies the black-and-white garments worn below are from?

1

2

3

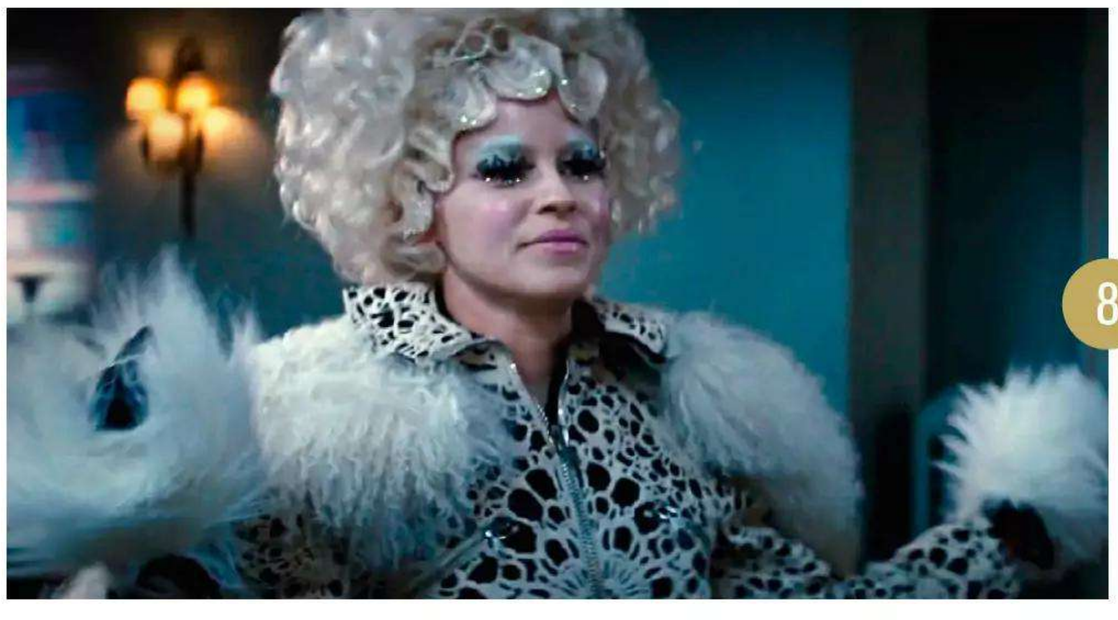
4

5

6

7

8



ALAMY

ANSWERS: 1. *GOAL!* 2. *REAR WINDOW*, 3. *THE MASK*, 4. *MY COUSIN VINNY*, 5. *BRIDESMAIDS*, 6. *TITANIC*, 7. *ZOOLANDER*, 8. *THE HUNGER GAMES: CATCHING FIRE*

Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.

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★ STAR LETTER

Ethan Hawke knows talent when he sees it. He once called Nicolas Cage 'the only actor since Marlon Brando that's actually done anything new with the art'. Recent performances in *Pig*, *Renfield* and *Longlegs* (in which he's stunning), as well as older turns (*Bringing Out the Dead*, *Adaptation.*, *Leaving Las Vegas*…) support this theory. I think Cage is truly the best actor I've ever seen. He always gives everything to a role. And he's always the best thing on screen, even if the movie isn't great! Forget the haters; forget the memes. He's not having a 'renaissance' – he's the ultimate movie star, and he never went away! So, is Hawke right or wrong? What do other readers think?

KEVIN STANLEY, RUSKINGTON

With Joe Russo recently declaring Robert Downey Jr. 'the greatest actor in the world', the time has never been nigher for a debate – and on a stage only slightly less grand than Hall H (i.e. these two pages; same passion, but you don't have to camp out a week in advance for access). Kevin and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *Boy Kills World*, out now on DVD, Blu-ray and 4K UHD via Signature Entertainment. Didn't send an address? Email it! Don't be caught off 'gård!

DADDY ISSUES

I recently went to see *Longlegs* with my wife, who had somehow got the impression that we were going to watch Sting instead. Halfway through the movie, she leaned over and whispered to me, 'When are the spiders going to turn up?' She also told her mate that the film we saw was called DADDY Longlegs. A film about a serial-killing insect? I'm in! Tanya, thanks for sitting through well over 30 years of cinema visits with me. Love ya. (PS: To make matters worse, she utterly hated *Longlegs*.)

PHIL SLOAN, BEXLEY

Watch out! Nicolas Cage's Longlegs is behind you!

@ericmalcolm
[ON SEEING *BLAIR WITCH* FOR THE FIRST TIME]
'We had to take a path through the woods to get to the [cinema]. The walk back was fun…'

We're in, too: let's have *Red Dragonfly*, *The Sil-ants of the Lambs*, and *Man-with-rolled-up-newspaper-hunter* (all based on the works of Termites Harris, of course). Sorry that your wife hated *Longlegs*; did she enjoy Sting any better? Or was she puzzled, much as we were, by the lack of any veteran English rockers springing from the shadows with death in their fangs?

COVER LETTER

Just a note to say how beautiful your *Alien: Romulus* subscriber edition cover was. Not since your *Dark Knight* stunner (issue 143) have I been this impressed. Let's hope *Romulus* lives up to your cover!

MARTIN JACKSON, BLETCHLEY

Much appreciated, Martin. We were drooling as much as old xeno-chops when we saw it (not quite as pretty a sight as our cover, alas). If you'll allow us a shameless plug, non-subscribers can join the club by turning to page 44 and bagging themselves a bargain.

BRUCE WHINE

Watched *Enter the Clones of Bruce* and was rather disappointed to discover that it wasn't the behind-the-scenes *Jaws* documentary I had assumed it was.

TOMMY RASKER, SOUTHAMPTON

This seems to be a growing trend (see *Longlegs*/Sting letter above); confusion

WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH

Exclusive interviews with Shawn Levy, Emma Corrin, Lee Isaac Chung, Oz Perkins, Maika Monroe, Ti West, Mia Goth and… Kevin Bacon! Plus, spoiler-free reviews and much more, every week.

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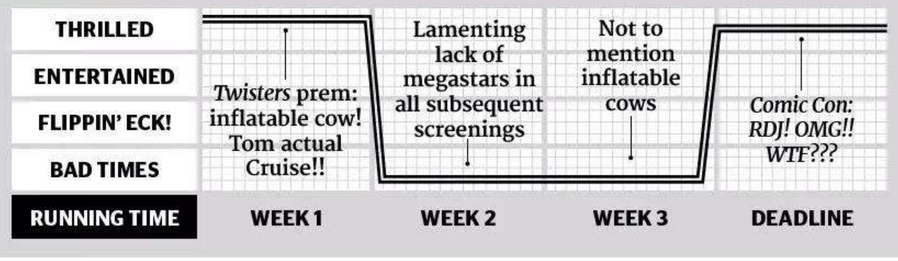

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OFFICE SPACED

CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE *TOTAL FILM* OFFICE THIS MONTH...

* 'Can't wait to ask someone, "So which half of *My Old Ass* did you like best?"'
* **'Watching *Twisters* in front-row IMAX was like being in a washing machine'**

Matthew Brown
[ON NEWS OF A *24* MOVIE] 'I am not spending 24 hours in a cinema!'

has also been sown by the likes of *Skywalkers: A Love Story* (nope, Star Wars fans) and *Hundreds of Beavers* (nope, OnlyFans). Good news is, there's some OG Bruce action on page 99 of this very issue (if you'll allow us only our second shameless plug this month).

QUIET TIME

I think the *A Quiet Place* movies are the scariest I've ever seen. The films have such a powerful impact that, even though I know I'm watching a make-believe scenario unfold, I'm still scared to make any noise in case the creatures get me. I thought I was the only one until I looked around at the rest of the audience and saw them equally silent.
STEPHEN MCCARTHY, GLASGOW

Kudos to the franchise that's done more to boost cinema etiquette than any number of pre-movie reminders to keep your phone and your gob switched off. (Conversely, maybe filmmakers could do snack-craving *AQP* fans a solid, alerting them to any imminent noisy bits with a flashing Monster Munch symbol).

SHOOTING THE BREEZE

Saw *Twisters* today. Really enjoyed it. Great blockbuster cinema. However, when a chicken appeared on the bonnet of a vehicle, I couldn't help but recall the awesome KFC ad I'd seen before the film. I then started imagining all the (human) characters behaving like chickens. That image was hard to move on from!
THE COLONEL, HAMPSHIRE

Just watched *Twisters*. I'm so glad I watched the 1996 original the day before, though. The story was better, and I didn't see much difference in the effects between the two films. I'd give the original 9/10 and the new one 7/10. There's a really great scene in the new movie (where a tornado devastates a cinema), and I wouldn't say it was a waste of time – not at all – but I do think some movies and ideas should be left untouched and not revisited.
MAJA MICHIEWICZ, NEW MILTON

TBH, it's a surprise it took 28 years to restart the franchise, given a) the original was a massive success and b) wind has never not been a thing. No excuse, really, when *Sharknado* unleashed six instalments between 2013–18, albeit all of them about as entertaining as having your new brolly ripped inside out by some bastard gust.

YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO Total Film, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR (postal addresses will be used for the sole purpose of sending out prizes)

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Total Film (ISSN 1366-3135 USPS 23870) is published monthly with an extra issue in April by Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK. BAR subscription prices are £71.50 for UK, €153 for Europe, $173 for US, £133 for Rest of World. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named World Container Inc., co BBT 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn Brooklyn NY 11256. US POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Total Film*, Air Business Ltd, c/o World Container Inc., 150-15 183rd St, Jamaica, NY 11413, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Future Publishing, co Air Business Subscriptions, Rockwood House, Perrymount Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3DH, UK.
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Printed in the UK by William Gibbons & Sons, on behalf of Future
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ISSN Total Film 1366-3135

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TOTAL FILM

60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

SPOILER ALERT!

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE: **BAD BOYS: RIDE OR DIE**

WORDS MATT LOOKER

FADE IN:

EXT: MIAMI STREETS
Detectives WILL SMITH and MARTIN LAWRENCE drive recklessly to WILL's wedding. They meet mayoral candidate IOAN GRUFFUDD. It is immediately obvious he is a bad guy.

MARTIN LAWRENCE
Congratulations to the happy couple! Now let's remember our poor dead Captain Joe Pantoliano. Hey, there's his US Marshal daughter. She might be important later.

MARTIN LAWRENCE has a heart attack and experiences a strangely artful sequence about the birth of the universe. Then he sees CAPTAIN JOE PANTOLIANO next to a tree.

CAPTAIN JOE PANTOLIANO
It's not your time. You still have the rest of the movie to go, rendering this whole plot development entirely pointless.

INT: PRISON
MARTIN LAWRENCE is now spiritually enlightened. It wears off. He and WILL SMITH visit the latter's son, JACOB SCIPIO, in prison. Meanwhile, CAPTAIN JOE PANTOLIANO is posthumously framed.

WILL SMITH
Everyone now thinks our old captain was corrupt. You killed him, what do you think?

JACOB SCIPIO
It doesn't matter, because we're going to retcon all that. He was actually killed for trying to arrest the cartels.

INT: HELICOPTER
WILL SMITH and MARTIN LAWRENCE transfer JACOB SCIPIO out of prison for his own safety. They are attacked, their helicopter crashes and they are all branded fugitives.

WILL SMITH
I still love you, son. Even though I barely know you and you killed one of my best friends.

JACOB SCIPIO
I'm too tough for emotion. Besides, this film is already half-serious action, half-stupid comedy. Can we settle on a tone?

Bounty hunters track them down, but kill each other instead. Despite this, WILL SMITH has several panic attacks. MARTIN LAWRENCE is comically useless throughout.

MARTIN LAWRENCE
Remember when I used to be just a humorously anxious dad? Now I'm basically a toddler entirely motivated by sweets.

INT: SAFE HOUSE
Everyone figures out that IOAN GRUFFUDD is a bad guy. Meanwhile, MARTIN LAWRENCE's son-in-law DENNIS McDONALD kills 15 henchmen in the best action sequence of the whole film.

ERIC DANE
Surprise! You don't know me, but I'm the actual villain. I have a motive, probably. Anyway, I have just taken people you love hostage!

WILL SMITH and MARTIN LAWRENCE question IOAN GRUFFUDD to advance the plot.

IOAN GRUFFUDD
We did deals with the cartels. They tell us about terrorist threats and we let them sell drugs.

WILL SMITH
That doesn't make sense, but we have just scanned your voice so we can arrange a meeting with the real villain, which also doesn't make sense.

INT: ABANDONED AMUSEMENT PARK
ERIC DANE uses the most Scooby-Doo location possible for his base. WILL SMITH has another panic attack, and MARTIN LAWRENCE slaps him repeatedly.

MARTIN LAWRENCE
Is this a reference to the 2022 Oscars? Is it OK to make jokes about that now?

WILL SMITH
It doesn't matter. There are guns, drones and explosives everywhere. Also there's a giant alligator, which seems like an unnecessary addition.

Everyone fights and all the bad guys are killed by guns, drones, explosives or a giant alligator. CAPTAIN JOE PANTOLIANO's daughter forgives JACOB SCIPIO by not shooting him.

WILL SMITH
Here, take this boat to escape, son. Don't worry about the law and due process.

EXT: PARK
Thankfully everyone is exonerated and they all enjoy a barbecue together, where WILL SMITH and MARTIN LAWRENCE bicker over who is in charge of the grill.

WILL SMITH
I think that went well! Between this, my new single and the *I Am Legend* sequel, everyone will soon forget about the… other stuff. Maybe I should reboot *Fresh Prince*, too?

MARTIN LAWRENCE
Great idea! Is the role of Carlton taken?

FIN

NEXT ISSUE: TWISTERS

SONY

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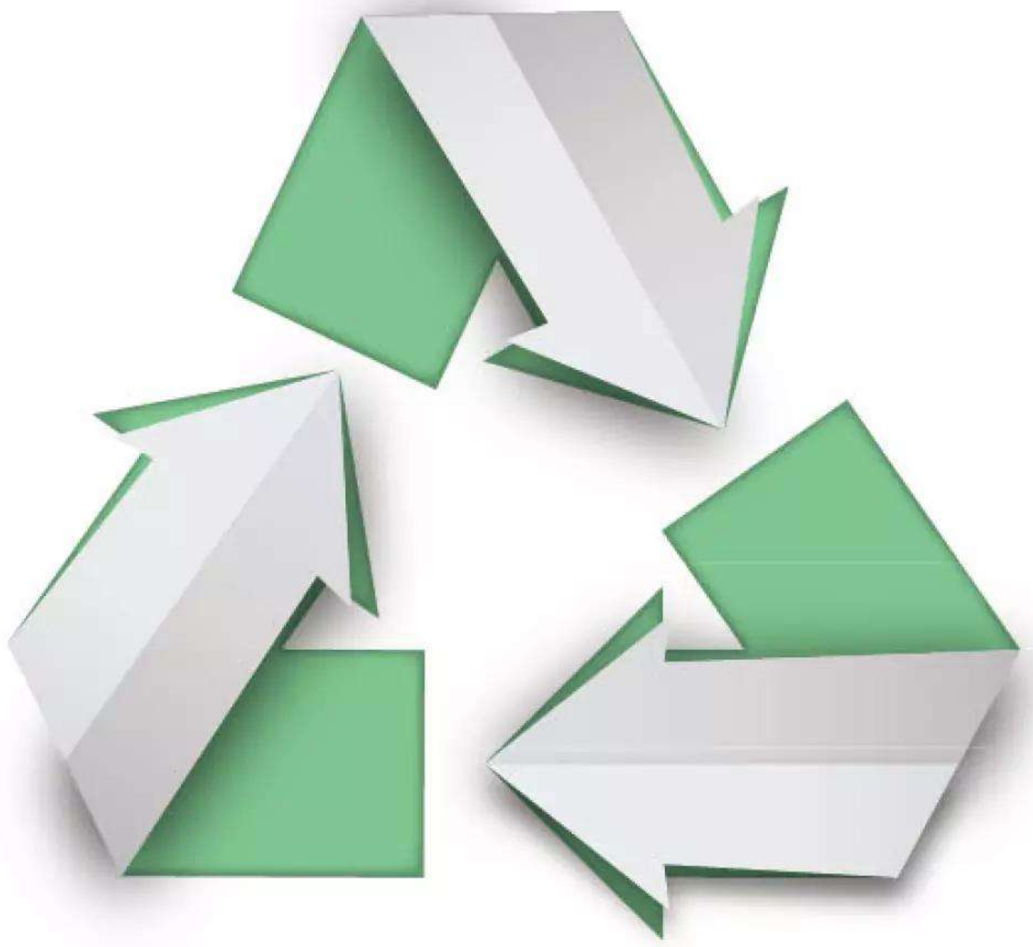

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